

# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

## Monterey, California



## THESIS

### THE REGIONAL RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS IN COLOMBIA

by

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June 2003

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**THE REGIONAL RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS IN COLOMBIA**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis focuses on the regional response to the crisis in Colombia. The major conclusions of the thesis are that the crisis directly affects the security of Colombia's neighbors; that the use of military force will be the most important element in a strategy to restore security and that the Colombian military will require external military assistance to do so; that while Colombia's neighbors have traditionally rejected ideas of intervention, there are indications that they may be willing to participate in such an endeavor; and that while less politically risky courses of action are more likely to occur, a regional military force operating in a peacemaking role will be the most effective course of action towards restoring security in Colombia and the region. These conclusions are reached through an examination of the conflict's effect on Colombia and its neighbors, the capabilities of the Colombian security forces, the history of regional cooperative efforts, and recent political rhetoric and policy decisions region-wide.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Violence and instability have dominated the political and security scene within Colombia for many years. This complex internal war involving guerrilla groups, narcotics traffickers and paramilitary groups has intensified since the mid 1990s and presented an increasingly lethal threat to democracy in Colombia. In an effort to restore security and ensure democracy in the country, Colombia's new president, Alvaro Uribe, has moved aggressively to take efforts to end the violence and restore some semblance of security in his country. He is committed to restore the state's authority and increase government presence throughout the country. Abandoning the unsuccessful efforts of past presidents to negotiate with the insurgents, the Uribe government is committed to strengthening the capacity of the armed forces to challenge the guerrillas on the battlefield. This military approach has led to an escalation of the conflict within Colombia and its spillover into Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil and Panama, all of which share borders with Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)-controlled areas in which coca is produced. Refugees and combatants cross the borders in increasing numbers, the latter seeking safe havens in which to rest and recuperate in preparation for further operations. Drug production has also spread noticeably outside of Colombia's borders, as a number of its neighbors have experienced a rise in coca cultivation.

The resolve of the Uribe government to address Colombia's problems aggressively and the resulting increase in spillover effects poses a number of challenges for Colombia's neighbors. Attempts to address the spillover effects generated by increased Colombian military operations will undoubtedly place economic, political and military burdens on most of Colombia's neighbors, many of whom already have substantial domestic problems competing for government attention. Although U.S. stakes in Colombia and the U.S. policy response have been extensively analyzed, much less study has been devoted to the interests and responses of neighboring countries and to articulating what form a regional response should take.

This thesis will argue that a regional military response, above economic and political measures, will be necessary to effectively defeat the triad of guerrillas, narco-traffickers and paramilitaries and restore security within Colombia and the region. Political negotiation with the actors who promote instability has proved ineffective, and the moral foundations of those enemies of the state are questionable at best, effectively negating the legitimacy of any outside efforts at appeasement. The dynamics of the conflict predictably negate either political or economic pressure implemented from a regional position; neither form of response can realistically be expected to convince the FARC to come to the peace table as similar “soft” approaches were attempted in the past by Colombia and they failed miserably.

Operationally, Colombia’s military is faced with the daunting task of not only engaging guerrillas, drug traffickers and paramilitaries wherever they may exist, but also of controlling territory and protecting infrastructure and civilian populations. A tremendous amount of manpower is necessary to perform what is essentially guard duty, and the requirement has detracted considerably from Colombia’s efforts to field a substantially larger combat force than it has in the past. It will be years before Colombia has achieved the necessary amount of manpower to maintain control of territory and conduct effective combat operations against the insurgency. It would seem then, that should a regional military response evolve, it would encompass a force that provides both the manpower and firepower to assist Colombia establish security and/or maintain legitimate control of it. This thesis will suggest that the most appropriate classification for such a force would fall within the definition of a peacemaking mission, the purpose of this hypothetical force would ostensibly be to assist the Colombian security forces in attaining the compliance of insurgent groups; namely by establishing and/or maintaining legitimate control of territory within Colombia. Such a stabilizing force would theoretically free the Colombian security forces from what is essentially guard duty and allow them to focus on the conduct of combat operations, at least until the point that belligerents have been convinced to negotiate a peaceful resolution. While maintaining the capability for combat operations, the concept of employment for such a force would be to ensure that legitimate, state sponsored control of territory is maintained while the



Colombian military forces combat the entities in opposition to the state. Establishing the mission statement of such a cooperative military force in Colombia would be a major requirement; in addition to being determined by the operational situation on the ground, its existence would be dependent on mandates set at the regional or international level.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

*The Colombian problem is a common enemy to this continent's democracy. These violent groups in Colombia have the potential to destabilize all democracies in the region.*

Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, September 2002

### **A. OVERVIEW**

Colombia is in a state of war to gain control of its national territory and establish the rule of law within its borders. The instability brought about by the interrelated wars of insurgency, illegal drug trafficking and growing paramilitary activity has posed a direct threat to democracy in Colombia as the national government has demonstrated an inability to provide security for Colombian citizens. More ominously, the crisis not only threatens democracy in Colombia, but it potentially poses a very real threat to security and democracy throughout the region. The possibility of an expansion of the conflict into neighboring nations is real, yet there has been little in the way of regional cooperative effort to address the issue. The purpose of this thesis is to determine whether or not a unified regional response to end the current crisis in Colombia is a necessity and if so, how likely such a response is and what form it might take.

### **B. BACKGROUND**

Violence and instability have dominated the political and security scene within Colombia for many years. This complex internal war involving guerrilla groups, narcotics traffickers and paramilitary groups has intensified since the mid 1990s and presented an increasingly lethal threat to democracy in Colombia. In an effort to restore security and ensure democracy in the country, Colombia's new president, Alvaro Uribe, has moved aggressively to take efforts to end the violence and restore some semblance of security in his country. He is committed to restore the state's authority and increase government presence throughout the country. Abandoning the unsuccessful efforts of past presidents to negotiate with the insurgents, the Uribe government is committed to strengthening the capacity of the armed forces to challenge the guerrillas on the battlefield. This military approach has led to an escalation of the conflict within

Colombia and its spillover into Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil and Panama, all of which share borders with Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)-controlled areas in which coca is produced. Refugees and combatants cross the borders in increasing numbers, the latter seeking safe havens in which to rest and recuperate in preparation for further operations. Drug production has also spread noticeably outside of Colombia's borders, as a number of its neighbors have experienced a rise in coca cultivation.

The resolve of the Uribe government to address Colombia's problems aggressively and the resulting increase in spillover effects poses a number of challenges for Colombia's neighbors. Attempts to address the spillover effects generated by increased Colombian military operations will undoubtedly place economic, political and military burdens on most of Colombia's neighbors, many of whom already have substantial domestic problems competing for government attention. Although U.S. stakes in Colombia and the U.S. policy response have been extensively analyzed, much less study has been devoted to the interests and responses of neighboring countries and to articulating what form a regional response should take. This thesis sets out to fill this void.

The primary question addressed in this thesis is:

- Is a regional cooperative effort critical to ending the crisis in Colombia? If so, what shape should this effort take and under what conditions would this come to pass?

Subsidiary questions are

- How does the conflict in Colombia pose a threat to regional security?
- Does Colombia possess the capability to contain the threat/win the conflict without cooperative multilateral support?
- What has the regional response been to assist Colombia end the conflict?
- What factors explain the shape the regional response has taken to date?
- What possible forms might a regional response take in the future and how effective will they be in contributing to a resolution of the crisis in Colombia?

Chapter II of this thesis examines the history behind the current situation in Colombia and explores the effect that the conditions have had on democracy and security within Colombia. Additionally this chapter details the threats the crisis poses for

neighboring countries and the possible effects on regional stability. Finally, this chapter establishes the center of gravity within the crisis and the form the necessary response should take. Ultimately, the chapter will argue that the conflict in Colombia does pose a threat to regional security; that weakening or defeating the insurgency will be the most important objective in a methodical approach to restoring stability; and that the use of military force will be the key component of any effective strategy implemented in Colombia.

Chapter III evaluates the capability of the Colombian military to prosecute the conflict effectively. It will focus on the structure, capabilities, will and shortcomings of the Colombian government and military in fighting the current conflict. The chapter will argue that Colombia will require assistance from regional neighbors if the insurgency is to be decisively defeated and security restored within the region in an acceptable time period.

Chapter IV examines the form that the regional response has taken and the possibilities of future responses. It will explore the reactions to the crisis of each of Colombia's neighbors, the obstacles to regional cooperative efforts and recent advances in cooperation. Reactions from Colombia's neighbors have been mixed, ranging from attempts to ignore the issues to rhetoric calling for increased regional cooperation to deal with the problem. Obstacles to cooperation include long standing views on sovereignty, internal political and economic problems, resentment at the high level of U.S. involvement, and the lack of precedence for dealing with the type of conflict taking place in Colombia. This chapter will argue that objections to regional cooperation towards Colombia are lessening, and that ultimately the dynamics of the crisis will positively influence the political will of Colombia's neighbors to participate in a cooperative military effort to ensure regional security.

Finally, Chapter V summarizes the thesis and evaluates the possible forms a regional response might take. It will attempt to address the structural framework required to create and legitimize a regional military action, examine the precedence for the use of such a force, determine the requirements and roadblocks to implementation, and forecast what the most likely courses of regional cooperative action will ultimately be in Colombia. This chapter will argue that even though a less politically risky course of

action will probably be undertaken, the most effective way to address the Colombian crisis from a regional cooperative standpoint will a military effort that operates in Colombia as a peacemaking force under international and regional mandate.

## II. THE CURRENT CONFLICT

Colombia has experienced a deterioration of democracy, economic progress, and social fabric due to the violence and instability brought about by the current conflict. As Max G. Manwaring states in his monograph on security in the western hemisphere, this deterioration is graphically illustrated by the following facts:

First, violence associated directly with internal turmoil is claiming over 3,500 lives every year. Second, violence is generating over 1.5 million displaced persons and 800,000 emigrants who are finding new homes in other countries in Latin America, the United States, Europe, and Canada. Third, Colombia's internal turmoil is also inducing a contracting economy that declined by more than 5 percent in 1999 and has produced 20 percent unemployment and the worst recession since the 1930s.<sup>1</sup>

The homicide rate in Colombia is the highest in the world and more than half the world's kidnappings take place within its borders.<sup>2</sup> The lack of security brought about by the 40 year old civil war has over time marginalized the government to the point where institutions no longer function in an acceptable fashion. In fact, the argument can be made that Colombia's sovereignty has ceased to exist due to the government's inability to control its territory and protect its citizens. Worse, the crisis presents an ominous threat to neighboring nations as it has the potential to endanger democracy on a regional level if its root causes are misunderstood and left unchecked.

This chapter will first examine the history behind the current situation and then it will explore the effect on security within Colombia. The third section of this chapter will attempt to ascertain what threats the crisis poses for neighboring countries and what the effect will be on regional stability. Finally, Section D will attempt to establish what the center of gravity is within the crisis and what form the necessary response should take.

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<sup>1</sup> Max G. Manwaring, *U.S. Security Policy in the Western Hemisphere: Why Colombia, Why Now, and What is to be Done?*, Implementing Plan Colombia Series, (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, June 2001) p. 11

<sup>2</sup> Council on Foreign Relations and the Inter-American Dialogue, *Towards Greater Peace and Security in Colombia, Forging a Constructive U.S. Policy*, (Report of an Independent Task Force sponsored by CFR and the IAD) September 2000, [<http://www.cfr.org/publication.php?id=3828>] 12 February 2003

## A. THE ROOTS OF WAR IN COLOMBIA

The current state of crisis in Colombia has its roots in the rather long saga of power mongering and violence that makes up a great deal of the recent history of the country. The beginnings may be seen in the earliest nature of democracy within Colombia. As Thomas Marks writes:

Precisely why Colombia has this profile is a subject of much debate. The answer seems to be an early history that boils down to a squabbling group of settlers in a vast land with politics a zero-sum game. The practical effect was that formal democracy, established in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, remained a truly winner-take-all proposition.<sup>3</sup>

The winner-take-all form of politics meant that those who held office would do everything possible to hold on to power. Ultimately this led to several civil wars including, from 1899 to 1902, the Thousand Day War in which more than 100,000 persons are estimated to have been killed out of a population then of about four million.<sup>4</sup> The period of civil strife known as “La Violencia” subsequently occurred between 1947 and 1958, stemming from clashes that took place between liberal reformers and conservatives in the 1930’s and 1940’s. Liberal reformers had seized power and initiated agendas that gave birth to civil violence between the two parties. The spark that set off La Violencia was the murder of a Liberal populist presidential candidate, Jorge Elecier Gaitan in 1948. Liberals and Conservatives battled during La Violencia and most sources estimate that as many as 200,000 people were killed during that period.<sup>5</sup>

Following La Violencia, the two major parties entered a period of peaceful co-existence and alternated control via a power sharing agreement. As a result of this pact, political parties had few incentives to compete seriously for the popular vote by offering solutions to the country’s long-term problems. In addition, the competing interests of the executive and congressional branches of government has contributed to legislative stalemate and the inability of the central government to address pressing issues. The two

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Marks, *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency*, Implementing Plan Colombia: Strategic and Operational Imperatives Series (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, January 2002) p. 2

<sup>4</sup> David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia*, (London, University of California Press, Ltd, 1993) p. 151

<sup>5</sup> Richard L. Millett, *Colombia’s Conflicts: The Spillover Effects of a Wider War*, Implementing Plan Colombia: Strategic and Operational Imperatives Series (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, September 2002) p. 6



branches have different concerns with congressional representatives focused on utilizing clientelism to maintain power in rural regions and the executive branch focused on improving the effectiveness of the central government.<sup>6</sup> The lack of state integration and cohesion brought about by political infighting is to blame for the instability that has plagued Colombia for so long. The lack of a focused effort towards problem solving effectively neutered the Colombian government.

As a result of the weakened nature of the government and social unrest, leftist insurgencies began to appear on the scene during the Cold War. Later, the powerful drug cartels were created and together they produced a new wave of domestic instability and violence. The leftist insurgencies included the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). During the Cold War, both the FARC and ELN were funded by outside players: the FARC by the Soviet Union and the ELN by Cuba. The same unstable environment that allowed the insurgencies to function also served as a “petri dish” for the emergence of the drug industry. As Manwaring states:

The illegal drug industry began to grow and prosper in this unstable environment of virtually uncontrolled violence, rural poverty, political disarray, and government weakness. That prosperity in turn provided resources that allowed insurgent organizations to grow and expand.<sup>7</sup>

While the end of the Cold War meant an end to a funding source for the FARC and the ELN, the drug cartels continued to thrive economically in a high demand market, even though they were being increasingly targeted by the U.S. and Colombia. Subsequently, the FARC, to a greater degree than the ELN, sought to link itself with the drug industry as a source of funding. The Colombian Armed Forces estimate that the FARC currently gets between \$200 and \$400 million per year from involvement in narcotics trafficking, a figure estimated to be half its entire annual income.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, the drug cartels, weakened somewhat from renewed counter drug efforts that were re-energized with the end of the Cold War, were easier for the FARC to dominate and subsequently tax. Thus, the two most destabilizing factors in Colombia, drug trafficking

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<sup>6</sup> Paul A. Beckley, *Maintaining the Violent Status Quo: The Political Economy of the Colombian Crisis*, (Masters Thesis, Naval Post Graduate School, Monterey California 2002) p. 51

<sup>7</sup> Max G. Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia: Threat and Response*, (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, May 2002) p. 2

and insurgency, were linked and their union multiplied the level of violence within Colombia. The Colombian government's inability to deal effectively with either threat gave rise to a third factor causing the current problems in the country: the self-defense paramilitary groups. The paramilitaries were formed and funded privately by right wing elites and by newly wealthy drug traffickers as a form of protection against the tactics of the insurgents that targeted wealthy land owners; they gained strength throughout the 1980's, although their tactics resulted in them being declared illegal by the Colombian government in 1989.<sup>9</sup>

The drug traffickers, insurgent groups and paramilitaries all are contributors to the current situation in Colombia, and the triad has its roots in the unstable and volatile Colombian political system that allowed each group to flourish. Section B of this chapter will examine exactly what the triad's effect has been on security within Colombia.

## **B. EFFECT ON SECURITY IN COLOMBIA**

The instability and lack of security in Colombia brought about by insurgents, drug traffickers and paramilitaries directly threaten the survival of democracy and the legitimacy of state institutions. To be completely accurate, however, this assessment should be considered in terms of a vicious cycle in which the lack of strong central government has allowed violence and instability to fester which in turn has further weakened the state by eroding democratic processes and negating the effectiveness of state institutions.

There is no doubt that Colombia is a democracy (albeit a flawed one as evidenced by the previous section); there are free elections, freedom of political action and civilian control of the armed forces.<sup>10</sup> However, the lack of security and instability has brought about an erosion of democracy in Colombia as elected officials and other public figures fall victim to political violence. As Manwaring notes, the degree of political violence in Colombia is stunning:

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<sup>8</sup> The Center for International Policy's Colombian Project, *Information About the Combatants* 20 July 2002, [<http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/infocombat.htm>] 29 July 2002

<sup>9</sup> The Center for International Policy's Colombian Project, *Information About the Combatants* 20 July 2002, [<http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/infocombat.htm>] 29 July 2002

<sup>10</sup> Tom Bruneau, *Juan Linz' Framework and Contemporary Colombia: Did President Uribe Read the Book?*, (Center for Civil Military Relations, Naval Post Graduate School, Monterey, California, 2003)

Numerous government officials have been assassinated following their election-138 mayors and 569 members of parliament, deputies, and city council members were murdered between 1989 and 1999, along with 174 public officials in other positions. This is not to mention the judiciary. In 1987 alone, 53 members of the judiciary were assassinated.<sup>11</sup>

The numbers are incredible and speak volumes about the nature and reality of the conflict and its impact on democratic procedures. The violence undermines the right of citizens to participate in politics, the ability of elected officials to exercise power, and ultimately the faith of citizens in the ability of democracy to offer effective governance.

At the most basic level of the democratic process, violence prevents Colombian citizens from exercising their right to vote. During the presidential elections of 2002, outgoing President Andres Pastrana predicted that despite the deployment of more than 210,000 security forces throughout Colombia, voting would be “impossible” in approximately seven percent of the country.<sup>12</sup> In fact, during the election many citizens were prevented from exercising their right to vote as at least 11 towns were unable to conduct elections and the FARC destroyed ballots in at least five cities.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, elected officials are handicapped in their attempts to exercise power by the violence; kidnappings, death threats and assassinations no doubt influence the decision making process for leaders of the state. The FARC is holding more than 800 hostages, including senators, governors, a presidential candidate and mayors, as well as police and members of the armed forces.<sup>14</sup> The most recent example of the kidnapping and assassination tactic was the FARC killing of a provincial governor and the former Minister of Defense, both of whom had been kidnapped and held by the guerrilla group since April 2002. Both were shot and killed by the FARC when the government attempted a rescue in May 2003.

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<sup>11</sup> Max G. Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia: Threat and Response*, (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, May 2002) p. 13

<sup>12</sup> Agence France Presse, “Isolated incidents reported as Colombians vote in presidential elections,” Agence France Presse, 26 May 2002

<sup>13</sup> Frances Robles, “Colombia Elects Uribe: Hard-liner Set to Take Majority as Violence Ruins Election in 11 Towns,” *The Gazette*, (Montreal), 27 May 2002

<sup>14</sup> Agence France Presse, “Rebels kill Colombian governor and former defense minister,” Agence France Presse, 6 May 2003

Ultimately, the level of political violence in Colombia has to undermine its citizens' faith in the ability of the government to provide solutions to problems; if voting is not guaranteed and political decision making potentially influenced by the amount of violence, then it is easy to conceptualize how a resigned, fatalistic attitude toward the efficacy of the democratic process might develop in Colombia's citizens. In addition, the conflict has hastened the erosion of an arguably already weak central authority in a cycle that grows in momentum with every turn. State and local governments most affected by the violence have felt ignored by the central government and this sense of abandonment has resulted in a loss of faith in the authority of the central government and the ability of democratic institutions to resolve the people's problems.<sup>15</sup>

The second area in which the conflict has negatively affected the Colombian state is in regards to the disintegration of state institutions. Rampant corruption and lack of governmental control in vast areas of the country have conspired to greatly weaken the legitimacy of state institutions and further erode public opinion regarding the effectiveness of the government. Corruption has seriously degraded the government's ability to deliver services to its citizens. Corruption is so entrenched within the government that it has become an accepted form of wielding power. As Nagle argues:

Traditionally, one's reputation and success in politics has been measured by one's success in adhering to the principle that no one general law applies to all and at all times. Each individual is regulated by whatever law one can secure from one's leaders. In this way, a politician expects to demonstrate his ability to shield his supporters from the rigorous application of the laws and thus a protracted patron/client relationship is consummated.<sup>16</sup>

Political corruption manifests itself in a number of areas; selection and promotion for appointed government jobs, influence of private interests on state activities, and state spending. The dishonest management of public funds in Colombia, according to the World Bank, results in the loss of more than 2 billion pesos each year.<sup>17</sup> The complexities of the current conflict exacerbate the problem by multiplying the existing

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<sup>15</sup> Luz E. Nagle, *Plan Colombia: Reality of the Colombian Crisis and Implications for Hemispheric Security*, (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, December 2002) p. 21

<sup>16</sup> Nagle, p. 14

<sup>17</sup> Financial Times Information, "Uribe Issues Presidential Directive To Fight Corruption," *Financial Times Information*, 21 August 2002

level of corruption to a greater degree; the financial strength that drug trafficking provides to associated guerrilla groups with the political ideology to work counter to a strong state presence are fuel for the fire that is corruption in Colombia.



**Figure 1. Zones of Illegal Armed Group Activity<sup>18</sup>**

Another indicator of the implosion of state institutions is that the Colombian government has never been able to exercise effective control or apply the rule of law over large areas of its territory. Due in part to the lack of presence of security forces and the protection they provide, institutions that are designed to protect Colombian citizens have weakened to the point of being non-effective in large parts of the country. Two statistics bring home the woeful record of the police and judicial institutions: One is that the rate

<sup>18</sup>The Center for International Policy's Colombian Project, *Information About the Combatants*, 20 July 2002, [<http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/infocombat.html>] 15 December 2002

of violent crime and homicide levels are among the highest in the world.<sup>19</sup> Second, the proportion of homicides that end with a conviction is less than 4 percent.<sup>20</sup> In addition, government presence is lacking in over 60 percent of the rural municipalities of the country.<sup>21</sup> Colombia's inability to establish control over large portions of its territory is graphically demonstrated in Figure 1. The map is designed to show the zones in which the FARC, ELN and paramilitaries carry out illegal activity. It is color coded, with the FARC area in green, ELN in blue and the AUC in red, and overlap in brown and purple. It is rather obvious that the institutions designed to protect and provide for Colombian citizens have been seriously degraded by the current crisis, further undermining the legitimacy of the state.

In sum, the conflict in Colombia has resulted in a lack of security that directly threatens to collapse Colombia by undermining the legitimacy of the state. The conflict has dangerously weakened the central government through the erosion of democratic processes and state institutions which when combined directly threaten the state as a whole. The intricacies of the conflict result in a vicious cycle that, unless solved, will continue to weaken Colombia, perhaps irreparably. Of perhaps even greater concern is the very real possibility of the conflict spilling over into neighboring nations and having similar results. Section C of this chapter will determine what threat the conflict in Colombia poses to neighboring nations.

### **C. THE THREAT TO REGIONAL SECURITY**

As serious as the threat to democracy and security is within Colombia, a more ominous possibility is that the conflict might spill over into neighboring countries, causing the same instability albeit on a larger, regional scale. The stability and well being of the states of the Andean Ridge have been indirectly threatened by Colombia's complicated conflict for some time, but increasingly there are signs that the threat is becoming a more direct reality. As a recent report sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations and the Inter-American Dialogue notes:

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<sup>19</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment-South America, *Internal Affairs, Colombia*, 2002, [<http://80-www4.janes.com.libproxy.nps.navy.mil>] 14 December, 2002

<sup>20</sup>Max G. Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia: Threat and Response*, (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, May 2002) p. 14

<sup>21</sup> Manwaring, p.14

Colombia's deterioration spreads instability and conflict beyond its borders. Insurgent and paramilitary groups have made frequent incursions into the neighboring countries of Venezuela, Ecuador, and Panama. Such incursions could well increase. The wider region is increasingly uncertain, reflecting both real spillover effects and independent, troublesome political developments.<sup>22</sup>

The spillover occurs on a number of fronts: large refugee flows out of Colombia and away from the affected border regions, increased drug cultivation in neighboring nations, and increased cross border movement of guerrilla groups and paramilitaries. Refugees from the crisis include not only Colombians but also citizens of neighboring countries eager to remove themselves from the violent conditions that are becoming more prevalent. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates Colombia has between 450,000 to 1.6 million persons that have been internally displaced by the conflict.<sup>23</sup> That is a tremendous amount considering that the total population of Colombia is estimated at 41 million.<sup>24</sup> It may also be an ominous hint of what may occur in surrounding nations as the conflict increasingly spills over into neighboring countries.

Drug cultivation has spread from Colombia to neighboring countries as eradication efforts within Colombia have forced coca producers into other areas more suitable for development. In 2002, as the area of coca cultivation decreased slightly in Colombia from 2001 to 2002, it rose in Bolivia and Peru to the combined amount of more than seven thousand hectares.<sup>25</sup> And while narco-traffickers have for some time operated across Colombia's borders, a more serious sign of the spreading conflict is increasing evidence that guerrilla groups as well have started to operate outside of Colombia. As reported in a recent article in the San Diego Tribune:

Colombia's guerrillas and drug traffickers have been crossing in growing numbers into neighboring Brazil, Panama, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela.

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<sup>22</sup> Council on Foreign Relations and the Inter-American Dialogue, *Towards Greater Peace and Security in Colombia, Forging a Constructive U.S. Policy*, (Report of an Independent Task Force sponsored by CFR and the IAD) September 2000, [<http://www.cfr.org/publication.php?id=3828>] 14 February 2003

<sup>23</sup> William W. Mendel, "Colombia's Threats to Regional Security," *Military Review*, (May/June 2001) p. 4

<sup>24</sup> United States Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook, Colombia*, (Central Intelligence Agency) 19 March 2003, [<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/co.html#People>] 7 May 2003

<sup>25</sup> United States Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 2002*, (U.S. State Department, March 2003) p. 14

And President Alvaro Uribe's 2-month-old government's military offensive against the guerrillas is likely to push growing numbers of rebels across the country's borders, military analysts say.<sup>26</sup>

The incursion of guerrilla forces into neighboring countries has brought the violence of the insurgency to those countries. Inevitably the paramilitaries pursue the guerrilla groups across international borders and that has resulted in increased violence inside Colombia's neighbors. Inarguably the conflict in Colombia poses a threat to the region, mostly visibly in the form of increased refugee flow, increased drug cultivation and increased levels of violence as a result of cross border guerrilla group movement. Panama, Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru and Brazil all share borders with areas of Colombia and all have been affected to some degree by the crisis. The remainder of this section will explore the threat to the region on an individual country basis, examining what the Colombian crisis has meant to each Andean Ridge nation.

Panama has been particularly hard hit by the crisis in Colombia. Refugee flows from Colombia have caused problems for Panama by placing a burden on already limited resources within the country; in fact the issue is serious enough that several humanitarian organizations have had to provide refugee assistance within the country.<sup>27</sup> Violence brought about by the incursions of guerrilla and paramilitary groups also has had a negative impact on the country. Panama has not maintained a military force since 1989 and as a result has been extremely vulnerable to cross border operations by guerrilla and paramilitary groups; both groups routinely cross the border. FARC and paramilitary activity has been especially prevalent since the mid 1990's as FARC cells send troops into Panama's Darien Province to re-supply, rest and relax, while the paramilitaries pursue them there in an attempt to destroy them.<sup>28</sup> The battalion-sized FARC fronts operating in the Darien have also developed a support structure to expedite the flow of drugs out of Colombia.<sup>29</sup> It is evident that Panama has serious problems with regards to dealing with spillover effects from the Colombian crisis. The lack of a military or even

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<sup>26</sup> Andres Oppenheimer, "A Military Force for South America?," *The San Diego Tribune*, 7 October 2002

<sup>27</sup>William W. Mendel, "Colombia's Threats to Regional Security," *Military Review*, (May/June 2001) p. 10

<sup>28</sup>Mendel p. 10

<sup>29</sup> Angel Rabas and Peter Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability*, (RAND, 2001) p. 85



competent security force has allowed the problem unfettered access in Panama. Thus far, the problems have been confined to the Darien Province, which is rather remote. However, considering the suspect ability of the Panamanian security forces, it is certainly not out of the question to imagine a scenario in which the FARC could move to threaten the Panama Canal in a possible attempt to garner international attention by seizing a strategic objective.

Ecuador has also been the recipient of a great deal of overflow effect from Colombia; here too there has been a steady influx of refugees and guerrillas crossing the border along with increased coca and heroin cultivation that has migrated from Colombia. The refugee problem is a serious one for Ecuador, a country already experiencing a host of economic and political problems, including five presidents in as many years and servicing a foreign debt that takes up a large part of the national budget. The U.S. Committee for Refugees estimated that in 2001 more than 2,100 Colombians sought refuge in Ecuador and that approximately 30,000 Colombian refugees were already living in Ecuador at the end of 1999.<sup>30</sup> Ecuador has also become a haven for insurgent guerrillas as FARC units seek out areas for re-supply and R&R. Additionally, the guerrillas have established settlements for family members within the northern part of the country and pro-FARC mayors have reportedly even taken office in some northern Ecuadorian cities.<sup>31</sup> As is the case in Panama, the violence of the crisis has also spilled over into Ecuador. Paramilitary units have predictably pursued FARC units into Ecuador to attack their logistics network and also to compete for coca harvests. The increase in drug cultivation was noted by General Pete Pace, Combatant Commander for U.S. Southern Command, when he testified before the U.S. Senate in 2001 that nurseries of coca and heroin poppy seedlings had been found in parts of northern Ecuador.<sup>32</sup> A further issue that is cause for concern is the level of support for the FARC among Ecuadorian citizens who live along the border. As noted by William Mendel, the

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<sup>30</sup> US Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 2002 Ecuador Country Report*, [[http://www.refugees.org/world/countryrpt/amer\\_carib/2002/ecuador.cfm](http://www.refugees.org/world/countryrpt/amer_carib/2002/ecuador.cfm)] 15 Feb 2003

<sup>31</sup> Rabas and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability*, (RAND, 2001) p. 88

<sup>32</sup> Judith A. Gentlemen, *The Regional Security Crisis In the Andes: Patterns of State Response*, Implementing Plan Colombia Series, (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, July, 2001) p. 5

Ecuadorian army estimates that as many as 60 percent of the residents in border towns are sympathetic to the FARC.<sup>33</sup> There is a real fear that the FARC could possibly recruit new membership from a supportive population within Ecuador and that such a home grown threat could threaten state institutions in an already politically and economically weakened country, much as has occurred in Colombia.

Refugees, violence and drug cultivation also characterize the spillover effect of the Colombian crisis on Venezuela. Violence generated between the FARC and paramilitaries has affected the civilian population along the border and led to thousands of Colombians seeking asylum in Venezuela. In one incident in 1999, a paramilitary attack on suspected FARC sympathizers resulted in 3,500 Colombians crossing the border seeking refuge in Venezuela.<sup>34</sup> Criminal violence has also taken its toll, with the guerrilla groups carrying out kidnappings and extortion operations all along the Venezuelan border. The meat and milk industries have been adversely affected by the number of kidnappings along the border, with some sources reporting as many as one every 72 hours.<sup>35</sup> Drug production has also moved into Venezuela, with sources estimating as many as 8 hectares of coca cultivation within the Serrania de Perija region and the destruction of three cocaine base labs in the same area by Venezuelan officials in 2001.<sup>36</sup> Venezuela finds itself in an unsavory position with regards to the crisis in Colombia because it is facing its own internal political and economic problems. A nation in such a weakened state is particularly vulnerable to infiltration by guerrilla groups intent on expanding cross border operations and the paramilitary groups attempting to stop and/or compete with them. The conflict has also complicated somewhat President Hugo Chavez's efforts to govern, as members of the Venezuelan military accuse him of supporting the FARC.<sup>37</sup> Finally, as one of the leading producers of oil in the world, Venezuela plays a critical role in global security issues. Justifiably, there are concerns

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<sup>33</sup> William W. Mendel, "Colombia's Threats to Regional Security," (*Military Review*, (May/June 2001) p. 9

<sup>34</sup> Mendel, p. 5

<sup>35</sup> Mike Ceaser, "Ranchers Fear Escalation," (Latin America Press.Org, 8 Oct 2002, [<http://www.lapress.org/Summ.asp?lanCode=1&couCode=26>] 15 Feb 2003

<sup>36</sup> Embassy of the United States, Caracas, Venezuela, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 2003*, (U.S. Embassy Caracas, 2003) [<http://embajadausa.org.ve/wwwwh2135.html>] 23 May 2003

<sup>37</sup> Mike Ceaser, "Crossing the Border with War," *The Long Island Newsday*, 8 December 2002

about how any detrimental effects imposed on Venezuela by the Colombian crisis might then adversely affect the world stage.

Peru has not been affected by the crisis to the degree of the previously examined countries. A remote, dense jungle encompasses much of the Peru-Colombia border, an area that is devoid of population and thus means of support for Colombian guerrillas. Accordingly, Peru does not face the refugee and violence problem currently seen in Panama, Ecuador and Venezuela. However, Peru has not remained unscathed by the Colombian crisis. There have been reports of some degree of FARC activity inside Peru, perhaps in conjunction with a re-emergence of Peru's own insurgent groups, Sendero Luminoso and Tupac Amaru.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, a well documented arms trafficking scandal was serious enough to contribute to the downfall of President Alberto Fujimori's government in 2000, as Fujimori's National Intelligence Service Chief Vladimiro Montesinos Torres was implicated in an international operation that apparently delivered 10,000 assault rifles to the FARC.<sup>39</sup>

Brazil is the fifth country that borders Colombia and it too has faced considerable challenges as a result of the Colombian crisis. Similar to the situation in Venezuela, Brazil has been forced to deal with violence brought about by guerrilla incursions and to a lesser degree a refugee problem. The vast nature of the Amazon makes it a daunting task, but Brazil has an interest in maintaining control of its borders and preventing transnational movement of guerrilla forces. Nevertheless, the FARC has been active in Brazil's border regions for years and there have been several well documented incidents of spillover violence perpetrated by the FARC within Brazilian territory. The relationship between the FARC and the drug trade cannot be overlooked as a causal factor for these incursions; the geography of Brazil, with its vast forested areas and extensive river systems, is well suited for drug trafficking and the guerrillas have aggressively attempted to capitalize on this for purposes of sustainment.

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<sup>38</sup> Sharon Stevenson, "The FARC's Fifth Column; Pastrana Issues an Ultimatum, But Rebels From Colombia Have Already Infiltrated Peru," *Newsweek*, January 21, 2002

<sup>39</sup> Financial Times Information, "Peru Corruption: Montesinos Arms Deal to FARC Revealed In Latest Peruvian Scandal," *Financial Times Information*, 3 February 2001

In sum, the potential spillover from the conflict in Colombia poses a very real and dangerous threat to the neighboring countries in the region. The violence within Colombia's borders can quickly migrate from Colombia to Panama, Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru and Brazil and not only cause minor amounts of instability, but also undermine the sovereignty, legitimacy and well being of each of those countries. As a result, the crisis in Colombia poses a serious security concern for all nations in the region. The given is that the crisis in Colombia poses a very real regional threat; the uncertainty is how to eliminate that threat. Part D of this chapter will attempt to provide recommendations on what actions should be undertaken to restore stability and security within Colombia and possibly prevent an expanded regional crisis.

#### **D. THE CENTER OF GRAVITY AND THE NECESSARY RESPONSE**

The situation in Colombia is an extremely complicated one where no easy solution seems clearly and readily apparent. The triad of drugs, guerrilla insurgency and paramilitary groups has become so convoluted and intertwined that picking just one aspect to address may seem overly simplistic. However, devising a well thought out response requires at least an attempt to identify the source of power and will that sustains the conflict in Colombia and systematic method for defeating it. This section will posit two key points: 1) Colombia must first address and defeat the insurgency if it hopes to restore security and achieve peace, eliminate the paramilitaries and reduce the drug problem; and 2) The most important factor in a multi-faceted attempt to restore security in Colombia and ostensibly within the region will be strong military action.

To achieve victory in the current conflict, Colombia will first have to analyze methodically the interrelated factors that combine to create insecurity and threaten the existence of the state. It will then be necessary for Colombia to engage, systematically and with overwhelming force, each entity separately. Any attempts to address the triad of drugs, guerrillas and paramilitaries simultaneously will ultimately prove to be an ineffective attempt in the sense of trying to accomplish too much with too few resources. The recommended systematic approach to conflict resolution is rooted in the concept of center of gravity. In any conflict, sources of the belligerent's strengths can be mental, moral, or physical; any combination may result in tangible elements of power, or

intangible elements such as strength of will.<sup>40</sup> Subsequently, the essence of any successful warfighting effort requires that such centers of gravity be identified and a methodical plan developed to defeat the enemy by dismantling those centers. In Colombia, the triad of drug traffickers, guerrilla groups and paramilitaries all contribute to generate the “enemy”: violence, lack of security and general instability. Each element of the triad could conceivably be labeled the center of gravity, as each one is a key component that contributes to the conflict. However, in devising a plan to restore security within its borders, Colombia should avoid attempting to address each element of the triad simultaneously; the result will be a prolonged, diluted effort that fails to achieve tangible results. Colombia must identify what its main effort will be in the conflict and put all resources behind it, defeating piecemeal the triad of insurgency, drug trafficking and paramilitary activity.

Establishing which element of the triad to address first involves a process of elimination. In the case of the paramilitaries it is quite simple: take away the guerrilla groups and the drug trafficking, and the paramilitaries will most likely follow. The paramilitaries arose in response to the lack of state control over violent crime that erupted as a result of drug trafficking and guerrilla activity. In essence, were it not for either of those two factors and lack of government presence in rural areas, it could be argued that the paramilitaries would not exist or, if they continued as a presence, it would be from a greatly weakened political and moral position, as their stated reason for existing would no longer serve as justification for continued operations. Eliminating drug trafficking as the key element to attack first is a harder argument, but arguably reestablishing control of territory by destroying the insurgency will undermine drug trafficking by making it easier to eradicate illegal narcotics cultivation. As long as the FARC and ELN are operating at will and capable of waging conventional military operations, establishing control over the drug problem is not really possible. Additionally, it can be argued that the guerrilla groups may have actually strengthened the drug industry by association. In 1982 the FARC made a decision to align itself with the drug industry in Colombia as a means of

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<sup>40</sup> United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Planning Process*, (College of Continuing Education, Marine Corps University, 1999) pp. 2-7

generating support for itself in the form of funding and manpower.<sup>41</sup> This link may be a key factor explaining how the drug industry actually flourished instead of collapsing since the elimination of the large drug cartels in the 1990's.

The process of elimination has left the insurgency as the element to defeat first. Further evidence to support this comes from an examination of the goals and objectives of the different violent actors and lessons drawn from Peru's experiences in dealing with a dual threat from drugs and terrorists. First, the goals and objectives of the insurgency are more threatening to the Colombian state than the goals of drug traffickers and paramilitaries. It can be argued that the narco-traffickers seek to maintain the status quo to ply their trade while the paramilitaries in fact desire a strengthened state that maintains the monopoly on the use of force. The insurgency, on the other hand,

is a political campaign to mobilize the disaffected and the dispossessed into an alternative society. Always their ultimate goal in deploying power is to create and safeguard the alternative to the society that they are creating.<sup>42</sup>

The FARC's attempts to mobilize popular support in an "alternative society" have failed miserably, and as a result they have relied on violence and kidnapping in their attempts to dominate the human terrain. As part of this strategy, they have taken control of large areas of the countryside from which to attempt to dominate population centers. The guerrilla groups, unlike the narco-traffickers or paramilitaries, also maintain a political agenda, making it a more serious threat to the Colombian government since its objective is to overthrow the current political system. This are several implications of this, not the least of which is that the guerrilla groups are the only part of the triad to seek an overthrow of the Colombian government through violent measures.

There is also regional historical precedence to back the claim for addressing the insurgency first. Peru's strategy in fighting insurgency and drug trafficking provides valuable insight into the methodology of determining a main effort within the context of a complex conflict and then massing resources to defeat the problem methodically. Faced with the simultaneous threats of drug trafficking and insurgency in the early 1990's,

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<sup>41</sup> Max G. Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia: Threat and Response*, Implementing Plan Colombia Series, (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, May 2002) p. 5

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Marks, *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency*, (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, January 2002) p. 1

Fujimori's government decided to concentrate on defeating terrorism before addressing the drug problem. As stated in the National Defense University's Strategic Assessment of 1999, "Once its [Peru's] insurgency was defeated, the state was able to mount a more effective national campaign against drug trafficking organizations, and U.S. assistance had a more substantial impact."<sup>43</sup> In fact, after eliminating the threat Peru, free from experiencing the terrorism wrought by Sendero Luminoso and Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement, was able to reduce the area under coca cultivation by half.<sup>44</sup>

In sum, the Colombian government must methodically analyze the inter-related elements of the conflict, decide which is the key center of gravity and then mass resources in a focus of effort to defeat that element before addressing the other two. This section has argued that the insurgency should be addressed first, and that defeating it will enable Colombia to address more effectively the drug traffickers and paramilitaries.

The second point of this section is making the case for the necessity of defeating the triad of insurgency, drug trafficking and paramilitary activity through strong military action rather than solely through political or economic means. Key to this argument is whether or not the guerrilla groups will ever renounce violent methods in pursuit of their objectives. As stated earlier, the goal of the FARC is the creation of an alternative society, the overthrow of the government and installation of a Marxist-Leninist regime. As Manwaring notes, "The stated intent is to create an army of 30,000 with which to stage a 'final offensive' against the regular armed forces and 'do away with the state as it now exists in Colombia.'"<sup>45</sup> What is most important to draw from guerrilla rhetoric is their insistence on utilizing violent means to achieve their end goal of a new system of government in Colombia. Political solutions have most definitely failed to achieve any viable results in seeking an end to the conflict, as the FARC's fixation on violence has been emphasized by their continued unwillingness to engage effectively in the numerous peace process attempts that were undertaken by previous Colombian governments. Additionally, the guerrillas' lack of public support, cited as less than 2 percent of the

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<sup>43</sup> Institute for National Strategic Studies, *1999 Strategic Assessment*, (National Defense University, Washington, D.C., 1999) p. 179

<sup>44</sup> Michael Radu, "The Perilous Appeasement of Guerrillas," *Orbis*, (Summer, 2000) p. 378

<sup>45</sup> Max G. Manwaring, "Nonstate Actors in Colombia: Threat and Response," *Implementing Plan Colombia Series*, (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, May 2002) p. 14

population in one source,<sup>46</sup> leads the FARC to rely heavily on torture, assassination, extortion and intimidation in an attempt through force to generate popular support towards their alternative political stance. In essence, the FARC has no other choice but to pursue purely violent means to achieve their ultimate goal of government overthrow. Neither their desired end state nor the means they have attempted to utilize in achieving their goal are acceptable; and because past diplomatic efforts at appeasement have failed to change their goals and methods, it seems clear that it will require military force to end the threat posed by the FARC. This viewpoint seems to have a great deal of historical precedence. As Gabriel Marcella states:

The principal lesson learned in successful modern counterinsurgencies, such as in the Philippines, Malay, El Salvador, and Oman, is that the battlefield must be linked to the peace process. A real peace process ending in conflict termination is only possible when the armed forces of the government establish enough asymmetry on the battlefield to convince the insurgents that further war is counterproductive to their physical and political survival.<sup>47</sup>

Thus far in the Colombian crisis, the FARC has remained unconvinced that further prosecution of their goals is counterproductive to their survival. This is because the military effort, to date, has not been strong enough to force a change in their goals and objectives.

Increasing the Colombian military's capacity to defeat the insurgency or bring them to the negotiating table will also contribute to resolving the two remaining elements of the Colombian crisis. Although the paramilitaries will likely fade with the demise of the guerrilla groups, those who fail to lay down their arms will have to be dealt with militarily. In addition, an enhanced military capacity is essential for addressing illegal drug activity. In a nation where drug cultivation exploded in the mid 1990's and has remained at an extremely high level ever since,<sup>48</sup> a focused, manpower and resource intensive effort will be needed to reduce the amount of cocaine flowing from Colombia.

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<sup>46</sup> John A. Cope, *Colombia's War: Toward a New Strategy*, (Strategic Forum, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, 2002) p. 2

<sup>47</sup> Gabriel Marcella, "The U.S. Engagement with Colombia: Legitimate State Authority," RESDAL, March 2002, [<http://www.resdal.org.ar/art-marcella.html>] 26 August 2002

<sup>48</sup>United States Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, 2002, (U.S. State Department, March 2003) p. 14



Here again, a strong military effort will be required to contain this problem, given the vast area of Colombia and the firepower capability possessed by the drug traffickers.

This chapter has examined the history of the conflict in Colombia, the effect that the lack of security has had inside the country, and the very real threat that the conflict poses regionally. Additionally, this chapter has argued that after a methodical, systematic approach is taken in developing a strategy for addressing the triad of insurgency, drug trafficking and paramilitary activity, the first objective of the Colombian government should be to defeat the guerrilla insurgency. Further, the use of military force, above political and economic means, will be the key to restoring order and security in Colombia. The question becomes whether Colombia can handle the problem without external assistance. Chapter III will explore the ability of the Colombian military to prosecute a decisive campaign against the triad of insurgents, drug traffickers and paramilitaries.

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### **III. COLOMBIAN MILITARY CAPABILITIES**

Chapter II of this thesis suggested that the key to reestablishing security within Colombia and the region will be the strong use of military force, above and beyond political and economic strategies. If one accepts that this is a sound course of action, then the next logical step would be an exploration of the possibility of implementing such a course of action, and key to that is an examination of the Colombian security forces, in particular the military. This chapter will explore the missions, structure, capabilities and shortcomings of the security forces in Colombia, and offer recommendations to ensure the military strategy will restore security in Colombia and the region.

#### **A. SECURITY FORCES STRUCTURE AND MISSIONS**

The security forces of Colombia are organized under the Ministry of Defense and are composed of an army, navy (including marines and coast guard), air force and national police. The National Police are considered a paramilitary organization and function as an important auxiliary force to the army in an internal security role as well as assume primary responsibility for counter narcotic missions. The president is designated as commander-in-chief of the armed forces while the minister of defense theoretically exercises both operational and administrative control over the armed forces and national police. In reality, the minister of defense exercises control of the military through the most senior military command, the General Command, which is headed by the Armed Forces commander and his staff. Conversely, the National Police, while theoretically controlled by the minister of defense, has direct access to the president (this access is generally attributed to the emphasis on the prosecution of the drug war within Colombia). Below the General Command, each of the armed forces branches also has its own commander in chief and general staff, organized closely along the model of U.S. military structure. The security forces, including all components within the Ministry of Defense, are made up of roughly 265,000 members. Approximately 168,000 personnel, roughly two thirds of the security forces, are military personnel spread among the three branches of service as depicted in Figure 2, while the remaining one third are national police.

<i>Forces</i>	<i>Strength</i>
Army	140,000
Air Force	7,300
Navy	21,500
National Police	97,000
Total Security Forces	265,000

**FIGURE 2. Security Forces Breakdown<sup>49</sup>**

The mission of the Colombian armed forces is to defend the country against external attack and to ensure internal security. Internal security includes control of territorial waters and the land area encompassed by the country's borders and the Colombian military maintains the capability of conducting counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist operations. Additionally, the military conducts civic action projects and also provides transport service to isolated rural areas.<sup>50</sup> Historically, Colombia has been fairly isolated and not threatened by serious foreign attack since the days of its independence, largely due to the fact that the heart of the country is located in hard to reach, relatively inaccessible parts of the Andes.<sup>51</sup> Due in part to lack of a significant external threat, the Colombian military has focused almost entirely on addressing the internal threat posed by guerrilla groups; internal security missions and counter-insurgency operations have taken precedence for some decades due to threats posed at different times by the People's Liberation Army (EPL), the April 19 Movement (M19), the ELN, and the FARC. The focus on combating guerrilla groups over the years has meant that Colombia's security forces have gained considerable experience in the counterinsurgent role, compounded by the anti-drug activities of the last decade. The focus on internal security is also reflected in the organization of units geographically: the

<sup>49</sup> The Center for International Policy's Colombian Project, *Information About the Combatants*, 20 July 2002, [<http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/infocombat.htm>] 29 July 2002

<sup>50</sup> Global Information System, *Colombia*, 2003, [<http://www.gisresearch.com/online/Colombia.htm>] 28 Feb 2003

<sup>51</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment-South America, *Executive Summary, Colombia*, 2002, [<http://80-www4.janes.com.libproxy.nps.navy.mil>] 14 December, 2002

army has 5 divisions, each with a specific area of operations and responsibility within the country. Each division is made up of three brigades typically, each with three conscript battalions and one counter-guerrilla battalion (BCG).

Of the 140,000 soldiers in the army, there are now approximately 60,000 who are considered professional soldiers (such as those who serve in the counter-guerrilla battalions) with the remainder considered to be conscripts who serve 1.5 years within a conscript battalion and then pass to the reserve. All recruits are trained in schools rather than units and all officers are selected from the cadet school in Bogota, with further specialty training at specific arms schools.<sup>52</sup> Military service has traditionally been obligatory for all males over the age of 18, instituted in the form of a selective service. In the past, the system produced a great deal of inequality as those who possessed a high school diploma were exempt from serving in combat units. Money could also be used to buy one's way out of service, the resulting situation being that the poor and uneducated served disproportionately in the ranks. New reforms under President Uribe have started to change the policy, however, as he has vowed to increase the number of professional soldiers by 10,000 every year (from 2001 to 2004).<sup>53</sup> In April 2003, the Ministry of Defense sent a draft legislative decree to congress that, if passed, will unify the obligatory military service policy for all Colombians, regardless of social, educational, or economic status. The decree specifies that there will be no difference in the terms of service between regular soldiers and high school graduates; all will serve in the military as either soldiers (the army and air force), as marine infantrymen (the navy), or as police assistants in the National Police for a period between 12 and 24 months <sup>54</sup>

Of the 60,000 professional soldiers, about 35,000 are available for combat at any one time, and these soldiers are organized into a number of highly capable units.<sup>55</sup> There are the counter-guerrilla battalions in each division as mentioned above, and in 1999 the government inaugurated a new Rapid Deployment Force (Fuerza de Despliegue Rapida)

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<sup>52</sup> Global Information System, *Colombia*, 2003, [<http://www.gisresearch.com/online/Colombia.htm>] 28 Feb 2003

<sup>53</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment-South America, *Executive Summary, Colombia*, 2002, [<http://80-www4.janes.com.libproxy.nps.navy.mil>] 14 December, 2002

<sup>54</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation, "Colombia: Ministry wants to give soldiers police powers; change recruitment," *El Espectador*, 23 April 2003

to conduct counter guerrilla operations in remote areas of the country. The force is essentially the elite of the Colombian Army and includes three Mobile Brigades (BRIM) and a Special Forces Brigade. The specific mission of the RDF at its inception was to “carry out highly mobile counter-insurgency offensives on strategic targets to smash the subversives' will to fight.”<sup>56</sup> Additionally, the 2000-2001 U.S. aid package funded the creation of three “counter-narcotics” battalions that totaled 2,400 new soldiers. Due to a change in U.S. policy as a result of events on 11 September 2001, those battalions will now be allowed to be used in a counter-insurgency role.

Equipment maintained by the Colombian military is indicative of the emphasis that has been placed on internal security and counter-insurgency operations. Instead of large numbers of strategic weapons such as fighters and armored vehicles, Colombia has focused on maintaining a larger ratio of personnel to equipment than most other Latin American militaries. Although it doesn't include helicopter numbers, Figure 3 graphically demonstrates that Colombia has placed a high priority on personnel, above equipment allocations, when viewed comparatively with other Latin American nations.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Armed Forces<sup>(1)</sup></i>	<i>Armored Vehicles</i>	<i>Combat Aircraft<sup>(2)</sup></i>	<i>Naval Vessels<sup>(3)</sup></i>
<u>Argentina</u>	69,000	1,463	123	18
<u>Bolivia</u>	33,500	168	39	None
<u>Brazil</u>	305,000	1,194	234	23
<u>Chile</u>	83,000	986	64	24
<u>Colombia</u>	168,800	300	46	8
<u>Ecuador</u>	57,500	264	48	15
<u>Guyana</u>	1,630	9	None	None
<u>Paraguay</u>	19,200	63	11	None
<u>Peru</u>	120,000	570	86	17

<sup>55</sup> Gabriel Marcella, “The U.S. Engagement with Colombia: Legitimate State Authority,” RESDAL, March 2002, [<http://www.resdal.org.ar/art-marcella.html>] p. 4, 26 August 2002

<sup>56</sup> Jane's South American Defense Markets, *Colombia*, June 2001, [<http://80-www4.janes.com.libproxy.nps.navy.mil>] 17 December 2002

<u>Suriname</u>	3,140	24	5	None
<u>Uruguay</u>	24,690	179	11	2
<u>Venezuela</u>	79,000	601	73	8
<b>Notes:</b> 1. Not including reserves. 2. Includes army and navy aviation, but not helicopters or combat-capable trainers. 3. Major surface combatants, missile craft and submarines included in naval vessel totals.				

**FIGURE 3. Regional Defense Comparison<sup>57</sup>**

A closer examination of the total equipment and personnel numbers of the major nations (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela) is telling. Although rather unscientific, dividing the total number of armed forces personnel by the total numbers of major weapons systems listed for each country results in a ratio of personnel to equipment that may be used as an indicator of the level of emphasis each country has placed on military hardware and personnel. Argentina maintains the lowest ratio, at 43:1 (43 personnel for every major piece of equipment), with Venezuela at 115:1 and Brazil at 218:1. Colombia has by far the highest personnel to equipment ratio of the countries compared, with 476 personnel for every piece of equipment. While there can be many interpretations of those figures, they do seem to indicate that historically Colombia has indeed placed a higher emphasis on the assets needed to conduct counter-insurgency, namely people.

The National Police were established in 1891 and are responsible for maintaining public order over all national territory. The primary role of the police force is the prevention, investigation and control of crime, along with the provision of security and peace for the citizens of Colombia. The instability over the last 40 years has meant that the functions of the National Police have encompassed internal security as well as normal policing mentioned above, and the National Police have become a vital part of Colombia's security force. The total strength of the police is estimated at around 97,000 personnel and within there are several specialized units. The Carabineros are specially

<sup>57</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment-South America, *Executive Summary, Colombia*, 2002, [<http://80-www4.janes.com.libproxy.nps.navy.mil>] 20 February, 2003

trained police that take on a variety of roles including maintenance of public order in urban areas, providing security along main roads and in outposts in guerrilla zones, and the conduct of counter insurgency missions. The narcotics branch of the National Police maintains a fleet of Blackhawk helicopters and other aircraft which they use for crop eradication; this branch has been highly funded by the United States. There is an anti-kidnapping and extortion unit known as GAULA; this unit is highly trained and used for hostage rescue within urban areas. Additionally, major urban areas have Transit Police who work for mayors in those areas but still fall under the organization of the National Police. With regards to equipment, the National Police maintain helicopters, fixed wing aircraft and a large fleet of motor vehicles including armored personnel carriers (APCs).<sup>58</sup>

## **B. PERFORMANCE OF SECURITY FORCES**

The record of the Colombian security forces in the conduct of counter-insurgency operations against the FARC has been mixed at best, even considering the recent improvements in capabilities and growth. From 1995 to 1999, the FARC was able to defeat the security forces utilizing large-scale ambush tactics and by conducting several attacks on isolated outposts. An example of this occurred in February 1998 when the 52<sup>nd</sup> Counter-guerrilla Battalion (BCG) of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mobile Brigade (BRIM) was lured into a prepared ambush and decimated at El Billar, Caqueta.<sup>59</sup> In August 1998, 1,200 insurgents attacked a conscript battalion and police counter-narcotics unit located at Miraflores, Guaviare; the government forces suffered heavy casualties including 30 killed, 50 wounded and more than 100 taken prisoner. The string of defeats had the effect of demoralizing the Colombian security forces, but also convinced the government of the need to strengthen and modernize the military. There was recognition on the part of the Colombian military senior officers that a modification in operational techniques and organizational procedures had to take place. Operationally, they recognized that in the past, and during the time of the string of defeats that the military suffered at the hands of

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<sup>58</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment-South America, *Security and Foreign Forces, Colombia*, 2002, [<http://80-www4.janes.com.libproxy.nps.navy.mil>] 28 February, 2003

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Marks, *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency*, (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, 2002) p. 8



the FARC, the military was operating in a counter-guerrilla mode, sending out small patrols from isolated outposts to attempt to disrupt guerrilla operations. Organizationally, the units exposed to the fighting were more often than not conscripts. The effect was doubly disadvantageous to the Colombians; poorly trained troops deployed in a fashion that was certain to ensure their failure. The FARC, on the other hand, financially enabled by funding from drug trafficking, had gained the means to switch tactics to a more aggressive, mobile approach to warfare. The FARC became much better equipped and subsequently gained the capability to concentrate significant troop concentrations in targeted areas to defeat the isolated army outposts. As Marks states:

The Colombian security forces were quite unprepared for this sequence of events after more than 3 decades of small scale, counter-guerrilla operations. The police, a national organization, though roughly 100,000 men, were spread throughout the country in small posts from which they engaged in the routine associated with law enforcement as opposed to warfare. The armed forces, too, in their disposition, resembled the dispersal of the U.S. Army during the Indian Wars rather than an organization geared up for mobile warfare.<sup>60</sup>

However, beginning in 1999, the situation began to swing back in favor of the army, and they improved their battlefield performance. Operationally, the divisional system was shaken up and a more intensive focus was placed on instilling a combat posture within the five divisions with area control responsibility. The traditional command structure was reorganized from the typical staff orientation (G1, G2, G3, G4, etc) into four directorates, Operations, Personnel, Logistics and Training. The elite groups such as the Mobile Brigades (BRIMs) and Special Forces Brigade were organized into the Rapid Reaction Force (Fuerza de Despliegue Rapido) which was maintained in a sort of general support role for all divisions, falling under the direct control of the General Command. Finally, a two pronged approach was taken with regards to addressing the main insurgent threat, the FARC. First, troops were allocated to protect areas within the country that were deemed vital to national survival such as power plants and oil pipelines. Second, the military moved to blunt the FARC's strategy for seizing power; tactics entailed cutting mobility corridors to prevent freedom of movement and

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas Marks, "Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency", (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, January, 2002) p. 10

then going after intermediate and primary basing areas. The new operational focus was on mobile warfare designed to seek out and engage the FARC.

Organizationally, the army did away with a policy of placing conscript battalions in insecure areas and thus virtually ensuring their failure in combat against the FARC. More funding was made available to increase the conversion of conscripted soldiers into professional soldiers. This was an important step as the standard term for most conscripts was only 1.5 years (1 year if a high school graduate), and that is too short a time period to train and employ a capable soldier. With regards to equipment, although there were vast shortages in transportation assets, crew served weapons and communications gear, reallocations were made that put the right equipment in the right unit's hands. The focus was shifted to combat operations and combat units became priorities for receiving the gear they needed. Key to making all the above changes was strong leadership, from the General Command to the Division Commanders to the Brigade Commanders. Shakedowns occurred at all levels and those who could not adjust to the renewed focus on combat operations and increased operational tempo were replaced. General Officers were required to take a pledge that promised their units would be combat ready within three months.<sup>61</sup>

Strong leadership was essential in bringing about changes in focus, operational techniques and organizational modifications. The military was able, in a few years, to field a much improved force that was employed in a more suitable fashion to the new phase the conflict had entered. The result was that in the three year span from 2000 to 2003, the Army won several battles in different regions of the country that restored some confidence in the military's ability to fight successfully against the FARC.<sup>62</sup>

As of 2003, the Colombian Army is bigger, better trained, equipped and led, and organized more effectively than ever before. Unfortunately, despite the recent improvements in mobility and capabilities, the Colombian military still has a very long way to go before it is capable of achieving the type of long term sustained success that is

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<sup>61</sup> Thomas Marks, *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency*, (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, January 2002) p. 14

<sup>62</sup> The Center for International Policy's Colombian Project, *Information About the Combatants*, 20 July 2002, [<http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/infocombat.htm>] 29 July 2002

necessary to win the counter-insurgency fight in Colombia. Part C of this section will examine the most pronounced shortcomings of the Colombian military.

### **C. MILITARY SHORTFALLS**

The Colombian Army has no doubt progressed substantially in the few years since their demoralizing defeats suffered at the hands of the FARC. Committed leadership has resulted in a renewed focus on effective combat operations; organizational structure and operational capabilities are both greatly improved. However deficiencies remain and cause some doubt as to whether the army can defeat the FARC without outside assistance. This section will examine potential deficiencies in the context of three areas: equipment, budget and manpower.

The first area where some shortfalls may exist is in regards to military equipment. As mentioned in Section A, due to the nature of counter-insurgency warfare, Colombia has historically placed a greater emphasis on personnel levels than on military equipment. Under Plan Colombia, the United States provided a large amount of mobility assets in the form of helicopters needed to move units in a more effective and timely fashion. Those assets have no doubt augmented the Colombian military's ability to wage war against the guerrillas and paramilitaries. However, Colombia has recently asked the United States for additional equipment to aid in the war effort. Specifically, President Uribe requested that aerial platforms used to gather intelligence in the conflict with Iraq be sent to Colombia to aid in the fight against guerrillas and paramilitaries.<sup>63</sup> Exactly what type of equipment is needed is a matter for speculation at this point, but the fact is that Colombia does perceive a deficiency in equipment, and the United States has taken the request seriously according to Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz.<sup>64</sup>

A second key area is funding, and a shortfall in security force spending can be seen in recent defense budgets. The military and police budget as a percentage of GDP did not change substantially from 1990 to 2000 despite increased aggression from the guerrillas, and although military expenditures were higher than average for Latin

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<sup>63</sup> Demetri Sevastopulo, "Colombia Presses U.S. for Equipment," *The Financial Times*, 5 May 2003

<sup>64</sup> Agence France Presse, "US Reviews Possibility of Sending to Colombia Military Materiel from Iraq," Agence France Presse, 2 May 2003

America, they were still very low for a country embroiled in an active insurgency.<sup>65</sup> As Figure 4 below depicts, the lack of any significant increases in defense spending prior to 2001 (and in fact there were actually decreases) adversely affected Colombia's ability to field a force capable of winning the conflict. The Colombian military did see a change in the budget however, beginning with the substantial increase in 2001, which can be attributed primarily to U.S. funding of Plan Colombia. More significantly, President Uribe announced plans in September of 2002 to increase military spending by an additional \$1 billion a year, to be funded primarily through budget cuts and tax increases to be absorbed by Colombian citizens.<sup>66</sup>

<i>Defense Spending (in billions, US \$)</i>				
<i>1997</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>
2.1	2.5	2.2	2.0	3.0

**Figure 4. Defense Expenditure<sup>67</sup>**

The third and most significant military shortfall is manpower. As mentioned in section B, the Colombian military has adopted an operational strategy of increased mobility to confront the FARC. The two pronged plan includes first cutting corridors of mobility to prevent freedom of movement, then actively seeking out intermediate and main basing areas in an attempt to destroy the guerrillas in their own backyard. Based on current assets and capabilities of the Colombian security forces, this is probably the only feasible approach to take. However, the problem to this approach is that it does not address satisfactorily the need for government forces to secure and control the ground. Colombia is the size of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana combined, and when

<sup>65</sup> Angel Rabas and Peter Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability*, (RAND, 2001) p. 105

<sup>66</sup> Andrew Selsky, "Colombian President calls for budget cuts, tax hikes to fund the war and goes to Washington to seek more aid," Associated Press, 23 September 2002

<sup>67</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment-South America, *Defence Spending, Colombia*, June 2002, [[http://www4.janes.com/search97/vs.vts?action=View&VdkVgwKey=/content1/janesdata/sent/samsu/colos090.htm&collection=current&Prod\\_Name=SAMS&](http://www4.janes.com/search97/vs.vts?action=View&VdkVgwKey=/content1/janesdata/sent/samsu/colos090.htm&collection=current&Prod_Name=SAMS&)] 24 May, 2003

one considers that there are only 60,000 professional soldiers available to conduct the fight, then it's easy to realize that the current operational strategy is much like the "whack a mole" game; it engages and is able to attrit the foe, but doesn't end the conflict as the enemy keeps "popping up" in another place. In other words, while the government may gain the initiative and inflict casualties on the FARC, ELN and AUC, the lack of ability to then afterward control the ground, permanently, presents a major problem.

Colombia's lack of ability to control the ground and restore security is directly related to the number and quality of security forces' personnel. Even with an increasing number of troops, the army is still lacking in the amount of properly trained personnel (professional soldiers) needed to fight and win a counter-insurgency war. In any such type of conflict, overwhelming odds are generally considered to be necessary in order to be successful. The necessity of protecting infrastructure while simultaneously conducting offensive combat operations takes a toll on manpower. As Marcella states:

Counterinsurgency wisdom suggests that Colombia needs a 10 to 1 advantage for the armed forces to prevail over the 20,000 to 25,000 guerrillas, plus the estimated 8,000 paramilitaries. This would require tripling the size of the current armed forces which would allow the Army simultaneously to conduct operations against the insurgents, go after the drug entrepreneurs, defend infrastructure and communications, and establish a better presence nationwide.<sup>68</sup>

Additionally, when considering military manpower shortages it is also unwise to ignore the possibility that the FARC may increase in size. FARC leadership has declared that it has plans to increase in size to up to 30,000 within the next several years.<sup>69</sup> If one is to believe the opinions on force ratios for conducting a successful counter-insurgency fight, approximately 300,000 professional Colombian soldiers would be needed to defeat a FARC that may potentially number around 30,000. Even President Uribe's plan to increase the number of professional soldiers to a total of 100,000 (10,000 each year from 2001 to 2004) will not satisfactorily address the manpower deficiency. As noted in Jane's security assessment of Colombia: "Even if Uribe is able to enact all the reforms

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<sup>68</sup> Gabriel Marcella, "The U.S. Engagement with Colombia: Legitimate State Authority," RESDAL, March 2002, [<http://www.resdal.org.ar/art-marcella.html>] p. 4, 26 August 2002

<sup>69</sup> The Center for International Policy's Colombian Project, *Information About the Combatants*, 20 July 2002, [<http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/infocombat.htm>] 29 July 2002

and improvements he has proposed, the Colombian military is years away from the ability to take the offensive against the rebels and re-conquer territory on any significant scale.”<sup>70</sup>

If there is a common theme that has led to the shortfalls in equipment, budget and manpower, it has been the issue of political will. In the past, Colombia did not exhibit a great deal of willingness to “pay the price” in order to defeat the causes of instability and restore security within its borders; equipment shortfalls, insufficient budgets and lack of proper manpower in the military were all symptoms of a greater illness, which was Colombia’s unwillingness to force an end to the crisis. However, that lack of political will within Colombia to properly address the conflict seems to have changed significantly under President Uribe’s leadership. New changes in budgetary procedures and military service policy all indicate a renewed sense of commitment that the burden for the war will be increasingly shouldered by Colombia. For example, the budgetary change announced by Uribe is telling and perhaps more significant than meets the eye. While increases in defense spending since 2001 (see Figure 4) may have indicated a shift towards a renewed focus on the conflict, much of the 2001 increase was the result of Plan Colombia, with a great deal of the military budget funded by the United States. Uribe’s call for the financial burden to be shared by all Colombians is a key indicator of the shift in political will. Additionally, the decree recently initiated by the Ministry of Defense that specifies all eligible Colombians will serve in the military, regardless of social, economic or educational status is a significant indicator of positive change. In the past, elite civilian authorities within Colombia distanced themselves from issues of national defense and considered combat duty suitable only for the lower class. This attitude of the “rich man’s war, poor man’s fight” complex was exemplified by the 1962 law that the Ministry of Defense’s new decree addresses, namely that it exempted high school graduates, or “bachilleres” from combat.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment-South America, *Internal Affairs, Colombia*, 2002, [<http://80-www4.janes.com.libproxy.nps.navy.mil>] 14 December, 2002

#### **D. A POSSIBLE SOLUTION**

There is no doubt that Colombia has implemented numerous measures to improve its military in the form of equipment, budgetary and manpower increases. It also seems clear that under President Uribe, Colombia now has the necessary political will to pursue a military solution to the conflict as political negotiation has proved ineffective. Human rights violations by the enemies of the Colombian state and their unwillingness to negotiate effectively rule out peace talks as an option in the short term. However, the continuing nature of the conflict and the realities of regaining and keeping control of territory demonstrate the still limited capability of the Colombian security forces to permanently restore security within the borders of the country. It will certainly be many years before Colombia will have the capability for eliminating the threat posed by the FARC, and it is wise to keep in mind that the FARC has plans to continue to grow in size. In the time it will take for the military to acquire the necessary support, capabilities and manpower to defeat the threat, the FARC may be able to gain in strength and/or seek refuge in neighboring countries.

Perhaps in recognition of the shortcomings that the Colombian military will continue to deal with in the foreseeable future, President Uribe in September of 2002 called for significant changes to the Rio Treaty in order that it might be used to address internal threats along with external threats. According to Uribe, these proposed changes would be designed to recognize the regional threat to security posed by internal conflicts and drug trafficking and subsequently make it easier for neighboring countries to overcome issues of sovereignty and contribute to the war in Colombia.<sup>72</sup> Uribe's call for updating the Rio Treaty also serves as another indicator that the political will has shifted substantially in Colombia. Previous president Andres Pastrana had, as recently as July 2002, rejected the notion that Colombia would be amenable to a multi-national military force assisting his country fight its war for security.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Gabriel Marcella, "The U.S. Engagement with Colombia: Legitimate State Authority," RESDAL, March 2002, [<http://www.resdal.org.ar/art-marcella.html>] p. 5, 26 August 2002

<sup>72</sup> Andres Oppenheimer and Francis Robles, "Leader: Colombia to ask its neighbors for more help with security," *The Miami Herald*, 22 September 2002

<sup>73</sup> Nicholas Moss, "Regional drug force for Colombia rejected", *The Financial Times Limited*, 30 July 2002

Questions remain, however, regarding the form that any potential regional response would take. The conflict is characterized by violence, lack of security and control of territory, and illegitimate non-state actors. Colombia's military is faced with the daunting task of not only engaging guerrillas, drug traffickers and paramilitaries wherever they may exist, but also of protecting infrastructure and civilian populations. Lack of control over areas dominated by groups hostile to the government combined with a military that is still some years away from having the proper capability for solving the problem is at the heart of the issue. It seems then that a feasible regional response would include an effort that provides both the manpower and firepower to assist Colombia in efforts to establish security and maintain legitimate control of it; in other words a coordinated, regional military effort is what is needed. The basic concept for employment of such a force would be to ensure that legitimate, state sponsored control of territory is maintained, theoretically freeing the Colombian security forces from what is essentially guard duty and allowing them to focus on the conduct of combat operations, at least until the point that belligerents have been convinced to negotiate a peaceful resolution.

In sum, Colombia has demonstrated its intention to escalate its military efforts in seeking to put an end to the causes of violence and insecurity within its borders. However, despite substantial security force increases, conventional wisdom says that Colombia is still years away from fielding a force capable of achieving strategic victory. President Uribe would seem to agree with that assessment, and he has made it clear he feels Colombia will require a great deal of regional assistance in achieving an end to the conflict. Whether or not concrete assistance is forthcoming from neighboring countries is still unknown, but based on the realities of the war, it does seem clear that if the insurgency is to be decisively defeated and security restored in the region within a reasonable time period, Colombia will require military assistance from regional neighbors. Each neighboring country has a vested interest in considering such a course of action to address the unfolding saga within Colombia, for at a minimum, Colombia's plans for escalating military operations will certainly increase the spillover effect of the conflict. Chapter IV will examine how Colombia's neighbors have responded to the crisis and Uribe's request for assistance.



#### IV. THE REGIONAL RESPONSE

*Plan Colombia is a significant step in the right direction with long term goals to end the insurgency through a negotiated settlement and defeat the illicit drug industry through eradication, interdiction and alternative crop programs. Although Colombia centric, the problems are in fact regional in nature and require a regional response.*

General Peter Pace, former Combatant Commander, U.S. Southern Command

Thus far this thesis has suggested that the key to reestablishing security within Colombia will be the strong use of military force, above and beyond political and economic strategies, and argued that Colombia does not, nor will it in the near future, possess adequate military forces to establish the sought after security in a timely matter. Additionally, the gradual increase of military pressure that will characterize Colombia's security force buildup and accelerated operational tempo will only provide an opportunity for the security problem to spread to areas considered safer by the guerrilla groups, which presumably are within neighboring countries. Ironically, the importance of cooperation between Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador and Panama will increase even more as the Colombian military increases in size and capability and begins to engage the triad of insurgents, drug traffickers and paramilitaries aggressively; the likelihood of spillover of the conflict will certainly increase as Colombia attempts to ramp up military operations in an effort to achieve an end to the conflict. Chapter III presented the argument that a regional military effort will be required in Colombia to end the conflict in the quickest manner possible. President Uribe has demonstrated he has the political will to support such an effort and presumably each neighboring country would prefer to see a resolution to the conflict as soon as possible. The question then becomes what has the response to the conflict been thus far from neighboring countries, and how agreeable would they be to any cooperative military effort to solve the crisis in Colombia?

This chapter will explore the reactions to the crisis in Colombia on an individual country basis, the history of regional cooperative efforts, and recent developments in regards to cooperative efforts that address the crisis. The first section examines what the individual responses have been from Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador and Panama.

## **A. THE INDIVIDUAL CASES**

Individually, the countries bordering Colombia recognize the serious nature of the crisis and the potential for spillover into their respective borders. Each has been affected by the conflict to a certain degree, however, reactions to the crisis from each country have been mixed with each country responding differently to the threat. Some have reacted favorably to the level of U.S. involvement through Plan Colombia and have sought out closer ties to the United States, while some have seemed resentful of the U.S. position and taken actions to distance themselves accordingly. Other neighboring countries have taken no significant action or have attempted to ignore the problem altogether. In addition to reactions to the level of U.S. involvement as a result of Plan Colombia, internal politics and economic problems have also shaped responses to a great degree. Brazil and Peru seem to take a hard line, “no nonsense” approach to the problem; Ecuador and Panama have taken a much more passive approach, while the form of the Venezuelan response remains hard to determine and predict. This section will examine what the reaction has been for each neighboring country, in turn examining Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador and Panama.

Brazil has been very concerned about potential spillover problems from the Colombian crisis and has paid close attention to cross-border incursions by drug traffickers and the guerrilla groups. The Brazilians have taken an active stance in stepping up military and police presence along the border and actively seek out and destroy trafficking and insurgent incursions when they become visible. The concern and subsequent response centers on the fact that the FARC and narco-traffickers have been active in Brazil’s border regions for years, and their presence signifies a threat to the national interests of the country, specifically control over the vast Amazonian rain forest.

The concern over protecting the sovereignty of the rain forest was noted by President Cardoso in November 1996, when at the end of the second year of his presidency he announced the promulgation of the "National Defense Policy" (PDN). The document was a first in Brazil’s history, but what is notable is that in his announcement of the new policy, Cardoso spoke of the Amazon region as the major strategic priority of his government, and referred to "armed bands who operate in neighboring countries, on the border of Brazilian Amazonia," and to "international organized crime" as "some of

the concerns that should draw the attention of the strategies that come out of this defense policy."<sup>74</sup> In fact, the vast forested areas in the country have made Brazil a prime transit state for drugs moving to the United States. Additionally, since Brazil is a key supplier of many of the chemicals used in cocaine processing, its extensive river system is ideal for shipment of the kerosene, sulfuric acid and acetone needed to refine cocaine.

FARC operations particularly within Brazil have caused a reaction from the Brazilian government. In September of 1996, the Brazilian army went on full alert in reaction to reports that FARC elements had crossed the border into Brazil; more than 1,000 soldiers deployed to the area to maintain a guard on the border and installations.<sup>75</sup> In 1999, the Brazilians gathered intelligence that indicated the FARC would attempt to seize a Brazilian Army airfield in an attempt to prevent Colombian military forces from using it to conduct operations against the FARC around Mitu, Colombia. A Brazilian special operations force of around 250 personnel pre-empted the FARC by conducting an operation to secure the airfield, and 5,000 regular soldiers reinforced that area of the border to deter any other attacks in that region. Beginning in September of 1999, Operation Cobra increased the federal police force in one area of the border from 20 law enforcement officials to 180 and equipped them with patrol boats, airplanes and a helicopter.<sup>76</sup> Seven bases were set up along the 1,020 mile border with Colombia, including one on each of the four rivers that flows from Colombia into Brazil, in an effort to heighten vigilance along the frontier area.<sup>77</sup> Brazil now maintains around 22,000 troops on the Colombian border to defend the frontier regions against incursions by FARC and narco-traffickers.

In general, Brazil's concern for the amount of narco-trafficking and insurgent activity within its borders and subsequent threat posed by these forces has resulted in a revitalized government presence along the border with Colombia. The increase in military and law enforcement presence along the Colombian border is further bolstered

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<sup>74</sup> Joao Filho and Daniel Zirker, "Nationalism, national security, and amazonia: Military perceptions and attitudes in contemporary Brazil," *Armed Forces and Society*, Fall 2000, p. 105

<sup>75</sup> William W. Mendel, "Colombia's Threats to Regional Security," *Military Review*, (May/June 2001) p. 6

<sup>76</sup> Peter Muello, "Brazil Braces for Colombia Drug Fight," *The Washington Times*, 19 December 2000

<sup>77</sup> Peter Muello, "Brazilian Border Backwater Gears Up in Fear of Drug War Spillover," *The Los Angeles Times*, 6 January 2001

by the emergence of the Brazilian Amazon Surveillance System (SIVAM), the key components of which are 19 fixed and six mobile radars intended to detect low-flying aircraft in Brazil.<sup>78</sup> In addition to controlling airspace and helping to defend the porous borders of the country, the concept of SIVAM is to protect against weather hazards, jungle fires and criminal activities, specifically to protect the treasured rain forests of the Amazon. Interestingly, even with the increase in military forces in the border region, the Brazilians seem to view spillover effects as a criminal activity, and the containment of those effects to be a police function. In characterizing the increased militarization of the border area, former President Cardoso was quoted as saying: "the Armed Forces are not to be used on an everyday basis in these battles, except to support the police."<sup>79</sup>

While Brazil has cooperated to a small degree with the Colombians in the past to stymie insurgent and narco-trafficking activities, the overall response from the government seems to remain focused on two issues: 1.) Preserving the sovereignty of Brazil's border above other considerations; and 2.) Remaining neutral with regards to the conflict in order to preserve a role for itself as mediator in any future peace process. Brazil's stance was stated clearly in 2000 by the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Luiz Felipe Lampreia, who asserted that "Brazil is not willing to send units of the army or the police to fight alongside their Colombian counterparts, whether against the guerrillas or narcotics traffickers". He added that any additional dispatch of troops that may occur will be intended exclusively "to strengthen our military presence on the border in order to defend and safeguard our frontier."<sup>80</sup>

Brazil's stance under newly elected President Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva does not appear likely to change drastically. Brazil, along with Venezuela and Ecuador, recently rejected Colombian President Uribe's request for neighboring countries to declare the FARC a terrorist organization, which under United Nations antiterrorism Resolution 1373 would allow the FARC's financial assets to be frozen and FARC members denied

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<sup>78</sup> Merrick E. Krause, "Partnering for Hemispheric Security: A Combined Regional Operations Center in Brazil," *Aerospace Power Journal*, 2002, p. 5

<sup>79</sup> Richard L. Millett, *Colombia's Conflicts: The Spillover Effects of a Wider War*, Implementing Plan Colombia: Strategic and Operational Imperatives Series (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, 2002) p. 14

<sup>80</sup> Larry Rohter, "Latest Battleground In Latin Drug War: Brazilian Amazon," *The New York Times*, 30 October 2000

asylum in neighboring countries.<sup>81</sup> While Brazil has taken a tough, no-nonsense approach toward containing the problem of narco-traffickers and guerrilla groups, its response has centered on maintaining the sovereignty of its borders while remaining neutral to the parties at conflict within Colombia. In Brazil's view, the potential of playing the role of mediator in any future peace talks is considered a long term advantage of this strategy.

In Venezuela, the border region with Colombia is an area where a significant amount of spillover activity has taken place over the years. FARC, ELN and paramilitary units routinely move across the border to attack one another and exploit the civilian population in the quest for seeking advantage in the drug and arms trades.<sup>82</sup> The paramilitaries attack the guerilla groups and the civilian work force that the guerillas use to produce drug products that ultimately sustain its force. Additionally, the FARC and ELN engage in kidnapping and extortion, aimed mainly at wealthy Venezuelan ranchers. The result has been a large influx of refugees from Colombia, civilians seeking a safer area to live within the borders of Venezuela.

In response, the Venezuelan government acknowledged the critical nature of the situation, although two radically different approaches have been taken: the pre-Chavez and post-Chavez responses. In the 1990's Venezuela began to be increasingly concerned with the situation in Colombia and built up greater troop strength along its border to deal with the insurgents. Resulting clashes between the Venezuelan military and the FARC expanded the refugee problem and displaced persons crossed the border in larger numbers; by 1998, there were approximately 3 million Colombians living in Venezuela. For example, the city of Machiques in Venezuela is made up of roughly 80 percent Colombian residents. The dramatic increase in Colombian refugees seeking asylum from the conflict was viewed as a major threat to Venezuelan sovereignty and, in reaction, the Venezuelan military stepped up efforts to coordinate actions with the Colombian military. Interestingly, the Venezuelan lack of support for and policy of returning refugees and displaced persons to Colombia seems to play into the hands of the FARC by delivering

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<sup>81</sup> Andres Oppenheimer, "Bad News In the Southern Front of the War on Terrorism," *The Miami Herald*, 13 March 2003

<sup>82</sup> William W. Mendel,, "Colombia's Threats to Regional Security," *Military Review*, (May/June 2001) p. 5

the labor necessary for the cultivation of coca. Social programs were also initiated in the border region as a measure against insurgent incursions into Venezuela.

The Venezuelan reaction changed somewhat when Hugo Chavez took office in 1999. At the beginning of his term, Chavez declared that he was “neutral” with regards to the conflict, and many believed that this was an indication he planned to recognize the FARC politically.<sup>83</sup> To date that has not happened, but Chavez has long been critical of Plan Colombia, stating that the large amount of U.S. support to the plan would lead to even greater conflict among the combatants in Colombia’s war, thus causing increased problems in Venezuela.<sup>84</sup> Thus, instead of increasing bilateral cooperation, Venezuela seemed to foster a somewhat confrontational stance towards Colombia. In October of 2000, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jose Vicente Rangel asked the Colombian government to improve its level of border security, blaming Plan Colombia for the increased level of violence along the border region.<sup>85</sup> The amount of cooperation between Colombia and Venezuela declined sharply as Colombia became suspicious of Chavez’s intentions; relations soured between the countries amidst allegations that Chavez was sympathetic to the FARC. Chavez has consistently refused to categorize either the FARC or ELN as enemies of Venezuela, maintaining instead that Venezuela should maintain its distance in the conflict in order to be an effective promoter of peace. Some political observers categorized this stance as a political-diplomatic victory for the guerrilla groups.<sup>86</sup> More incriminating evidence of Chavez’s alleged support for the guerrillas came directly from those groups themselves. In September of 2000, spokespersons for the FARC and ELN came forth with statements that seemed to imply Chavez’s administration was, at the very least, relatively uninterested in maintaining solidarity with the Colombian government:

Recently, a senior ELN commander said his group was respecting its "agreements" with the Venezuelan government, which quickly denied the

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<sup>83</sup> Jose de Cordoba, “Colombia, in Fight of Its Life, Looks Warily East --- Intelligence Reports Add To Long-Held Suspicion That Venezuela Aids Rebels,” *Wall Street Journal*, 26 March, 2003

<sup>84</sup> William W. Mendel, “Colombia’s Threats to Regional Security,” *Military Review*, (May/June 2001) p. 5

<sup>85</sup> Associated Press, “Venezuela Bristles at Border Crossings,” *The Washington Times*, 25 October, 2000

<sup>86</sup> Jose Zambrano, “Venezuela: Colombian Rebels Another Political Problem for Chavez,” Global Information Network, 22 February 2002

existence of any such accord. Ruben Zamora, the FARC commander in Catatumbo region, says there has been a "change of attitude" on the part of the Venezuelan armed forces since Mr. Chavez came to power, but he too denies the existence of any formal agreement.<sup>87</sup>

More recently, the Venezuelan military has been accused of directly supporting the Colombian guerrillas. In March 2003, in an incident characteristic of the complicated nature of the conflict, Colombian villagers under the protection of paramilitary forces reported that FARC units attacked their hamlet of Monte Adentro from staging areas in Venezuela, and that Venezuelan aircraft bombed the paramilitary positions in Colombia.<sup>88</sup> Chavez acknowledged the bombing, however, he maintained that the incident took place within Venezuela territory. Colombian military officers have long maintained that the FARC uses Venezuela as a staging area to conduct military strikes from a protected refuge. Venezuela has officially disputed that claim, maintaining instead that Colombia has allowed paramilitary forces to operate with impunity in the region. Despite this, they have refused Colombian requests to pursue guerrilla units into Venezuela.<sup>89</sup>

The reaction of Venezuela under Hugo Chavez to the Colombian crisis remains hard to quantify. Chavez probably desires to strengthen his position as a regional leader without compromising his support from the left; this may be reflected in his desire to appear to remain neutral with regards to the conflict. Still, his true motivations are hard to determine. The political situation in Venezuela is so polarized that even accusations by members of his own military about his complicity with Colombian guerrillas must be viewed critically.<sup>90</sup> Regardless, the Chavez administration remains firmly critical of Plan Colombia and as such, it seems unlikely that any great deal of cooperation between Venezuela and Colombia in dealing with the crisis will evolve anytime soon, although it is possible that a new administration in Venezuela in the near future may change that outlook.

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<sup>87</sup> Anonymous, "The Americas: Blood on the Border," *The Economist*, 16 September 2000

<sup>88</sup> Scott Wilson, "Venezuela Becomes Embroiled in Colombian War; Reports of Bombed Villages on Northeastern Frontier Point to Military Support for Guerrillas," *The Washington Post*, 10 April 2003

<sup>89</sup> Wilson,

<sup>90</sup> Mike Ceaser, "Crossing the Border with War," *The Long Island Newsday*, 8 December 2002

In recent years, Peru has generally sought to confront directly the problems brought about by the conflict in Colombia. A strong military that was effective in decisively attacking Peru's own insurgent organizations, the Shining Path-Sendero Luminoso and Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement, remained ready to handle any major Colombian guerrilla incursion. Under President Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000), the stance of Peru was very much hard-line. Fujimori made clear his willingness to utilize Peruvian military forces to combat the FARC, strengthened his forces along the border, called for a war "without concessions" on the FARC, and authorized cooperative efforts between the Peruvian and Colombian militaries to exchange intelligence and coordinate efforts.<sup>91</sup> In fighting its own insurgency, the military under Fujimori was given free reign to put down the Shining Path organization that had terrorized Peru for more than a decade in a conflict that left more than 25,000 people dead.<sup>92</sup> In addition to Fujimori's tough stance, the extreme geography of the border region between Colombia and Peru helped to contain the impact of the Colombian crisis on Peru. Much of the 1,000 mile border encompasses an area of dense jungle, extremely remote and uninhabited, that is generally considered to be incapable of supporting insurgent military operations.

While the terrain remains the same, Peru's position under President Alejandro Toledo (2001-present) has not. Elected following the arms trafficking scandal that helped to bring down Fujimori's administration, Toledo's goal of creating a more open, responsive democracy has included attempts to bring the Peruvian military back into the fold of increased civilian control. Through budget cuts and criticism of past tactics, Toledo has attempted to reform a military that owed much of its power to Fujimori. The budget was cut some 15 percent to pay for social programs, and Toledo has been publicly critical of the brutal, if successful, tactics used by government forces to end the guerrilla movement. Further, hundreds of officers have been cashiered, including three general officers who previously made up the joint chiefs of staff, but were implicated in Fujimori-era corruption scandals.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Richard L. Millett, *Colombia's Conflicts: The Spillover Effects of a Wider War*, Implementing Plan Colombia: Strategic and Operational Imperatives Series (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, 2002) p 8.

<sup>92</sup> Scott Wilson, "Morale Crisis in Peru's Army Could Let Guerrillas Regroup," *The Washington Post*, 13 June, 2002

<sup>93</sup> Wilson,



Toledo's attempts to reform the military have most likely resulted in a weakening of Peru's security posture. Although Peru and Colombia have continued to pledge mutual cooperation, Toledo's actions with regards to the military probably had the unintended consequence of a less active stance with regards to the crisis from Peru. Personnel cuts and budget reductions have led to decreased morale in the military. The unfortunate result may be an increase in FARC activities along the border and into Peru. Despite Peruvian Defense Minister Walter Ledesma's claim that the border was peaceful, the government reinforced the border area in February of 2001. Further, the Colombian government has maintained that the FARC are increasingly crossing into Peru, and in January of 2002, Newsweek published a story that alleged the FARC was operating within Peru, an allegation that the FARC did not dispute except to say it was on a temporary basis.<sup>94</sup> Although continuing to deny an increased FARC presence in Peru, President Toledo stated in March 2002 that as a precaution he had moved military bases from the border of Ecuador to the border of Colombia.<sup>95</sup>

The increase in FARC activity seems to coincide with a rising level of activity from Shining Path and other, smaller revolutionary groups within Peru. In 2002, there were reports of Shining Path rebels skirmishing with Peruvian Army and police units and, more ominously, that former commanders of Peru's smaller, urban-based Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement were seen leaving the country in early November with a FARC column, apparently for consultations with guerrilla chieftains in Colombia.<sup>96</sup>

Peru's response to the crisis in Colombia has been determined to a great extent by the character of the administration in power. Under Fujimori, it was one of a tough, no-nonsense approach, stemming perhaps from Peru's own successful experience fighting its own insurgency. It is probably accurate to say that as a result of Fujimori's strong approach and cooperative efforts between Colombia and Peru, the severity of the spillover from the conflict was minimized. And while cooperation between the Peruvian

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<sup>94</sup> Richard L. Millett, *Colombia's Conflicts: The Spillover Effects of a Wider War*, Implementing Plan Colombia: Strategic and Operational Imperatives Series (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, 2002) p 8.

<sup>95</sup> Elisabeth Bumiller, "Bush Vows to Help Peru Fight Rebels and Keep Andes Region Stable," *New York Times*, 24 March, 2002

<sup>96</sup> Sharon Stevenson, "The FARC's Fifth Column; Pastrana issues an ultimatum, but rebels from Colombia have already infiltrated Peru," *Newsweek*, January 21, 2002

and Colombian militaries has remained good, Peru's stance under Toledo has softened, at least in the initial stages of his presidency. His efforts to bring the free wheeling military more under the control of civilian power has resulted in decreased morale and effectiveness. This has apparently contributed to increased insurgent activity, both emanating from Colombia and from within Peru itself. Conversely, Peru under Toledo remains fully supportive of Plan Colombia. The cooperation is helped no doubt by planned increases in U.S. counter drug assistance to Peru, with planned funding being tripled to 150 million dollars.<sup>97</sup>

In Ecuador, in contrast, the response to the Colombian crisis has been characterized overall by a desire to remain neutral, albeit with a resigned willingness to become more engaged should the dynamics of the conflict be forced upon the country. Political and economic instability and a rather weak security capability are probably contributing factors to Ecuador's reluctance to side with the Colombian government. Ecuador is handicapped by a foreign debt that makes up 40 percent of the national budget and a political situation in which the country has seen five presidents in as many years.<sup>98</sup> And, while the army is popular with the rural population and seen as a source of stability, it is doubtful whether it has the capability to confront experienced Colombian insurgents effectively.

Ecuador's desire to maintain a neutral stance is reflected in the recent decision, taken along with Venezuela and Brazil, to avoid declaring the leftist guerrillas and right-wing paramilitaries in Colombia terrorist organizations. Presumably this position stems from a desire to help negotiate a peaceful solution, although some sources indicate that the decision is predicated more on a fear of becoming further involved in what may be viewed as a sovereignty issue. An Ecuadorian military officer was recently quoted as saying that Ecuador would not declare Colombia's insurgents "terrorists" because that would amount to "an indirect intervention in the conflict" in that country, which "the

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<sup>97</sup> Elisabeth Bumiller, "Bush Vows to Help Peru Fight Rebels and Keep Andes Region Stable," *New York Times*, 24 March, 2002

<sup>98</sup> William W. Mendel, "Colombia's Threats to Regional Security," *Military Review*, (May/June 2001) p. 10

Ecuadorian armed forces are not willing to get involved in.”<sup>99</sup>

While Ecuador would prefer to remain neutral, it has taken several steps that seem to indicate willingness, however tentative, to undertake measures to blunt the effects of potential spillover. Despite the political, economic and security concerns mentioned above, Ecuador has attempted to maintain some semblance of initiative by addressing the spillover issues in several key areas. Beginning in 1999, the military began to step up patrols in the border region in reaction to suspected FARC cross border activity. When FARC activity increased in 2000, Ecuador’s Foreign Minister, Heinz Moeller, stated that “We don’t want anything to do with the internal Colombian conflict other than to see a negotiated peace, but if we are left with no alternative we will have to confront them militarily.”<sup>100</sup> In response to a further deterioration since that time, Ecuador has assigned even more personnel to the border; 6,000 additional troops were recently moved to the region.<sup>101</sup> And in March 2002, Vice President Pedro Pinto said he would ask for additional funding from the U.S. to help strengthen its northern border with Colombia.<sup>102</sup> To address the increased refugee flows, Ecuador has lobbied for additional funding from outside sources, namely through efforts to work with the UNHCR and an initiative to create an asylum policy that is supportive of displaced persons from the border region. Additionally, Ecuador established a 10 year agreement with the United States to allow a forward operating base in Manta; from the base, military surveillance aircraft will operate in order to detect aircraft engaged in drug trafficking operations.

Despite Ecuador’s directed efforts at restoring security, Colombian guerrilla groups and paramilitaries have continued to operate openly in the border region and the refugee problem remains a major issue. Justifiably, Ecuador’s concern about an escalation of the conflict is attributed to fears that future military effort by Colombia against guerrillas will result in even more rebel incursions and an even larger refugee

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<sup>99</sup> Lucas Kintto, “Ecuador: Army Keeping Its Distance From Colombian Conflict,” Global Information Network, 3 March 2003

<sup>100</sup> Richard L. Millett, *Colombia’s Conflicts: The Spillover Effects of a Wider War*, Implementing Plan Colombia: Strategic and Operational Imperatives Series (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, 2002) p 10

<sup>101</sup> Yadira Ferrer, “Colombia: Poverty Deepens, with Peace Still Distant,” Global Information Network, 16 January, 2003

<sup>102</sup> Nicholas Moss, “Ecuador wants money to strengthen border; Guerrilla Infiltration Concern Grows After Military Action Against FARC,” *The Financial Times Limited*, 8 March 2002

crisis, issues they are reluctant to face given their internal problems. Ecuador's efforts to maintain some degree of initiative have been somewhat effective as short term solutions to the problem, yet it would seem that by attempting to maintain neutrality Ecuador is failing to directly address the inevitable increase in problems that more aggressive Colombian military efforts will bring. A neutral stance will most likely result only in a continuation of semi-effective measures that address symptoms, highlighting the necessity for renewed cooperation with Colombia and the other nations in the region to address the root cause.

In Panama, officials have tended to downplay the potential gravity of any crisis spillover, however, of all the countries bordering Colombia, Panama probably faces the greatest threat, primarily because the country is so weak politically and militarily. Panama has the poorest capability for providing any type of security against insurgent and narco-trafficker incursions originating from Colombia because it has not had a military since 1989 and does not maintain the capability for performing counter-insurgency or counter-drug missions. The country does maintain a Border Police Service with more than 2,000 personnel stationed along the border with Colombia, but it is not organized or equipped to deal with the insurgent threat presented by the Colombian crisis. The political situation is not much brighter. Under President Mireya Moscoso, who came into power in 1999, Panama has chosen to stick its head in the sand with regards to the spillover effect. The administration did little to attempt to establish control over the Darien province region bordering Colombia. Incredibly, Panamanian Public Force units in the Darien were actually encouraged to avoid contact with Colombian insurgent groups operating in Panama.<sup>103</sup>

The combination of a non-existent military capability and a weak political stance have exacerbated the porous nature of the Panamanian border and allowed the FARC to seek shelter freely in the Darien, both for rest and for establishing an avenue to receive supplies originating from other Central American countries. Panamanian authorities have routinely discovered arms shipments bound for Colombia. One such shipment, seized in

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<sup>103</sup> Richard L. Millett, *Colombia's Conflicts: The Spillover Effects of a Wider War*, Implementing Plan Colombia: Strategic and Operational Imperatives Series (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, 2002) p 12

the fall of 2000, was the largest in the nation's history and included 271 AK-47 assault rifles, 318 grenade launchers, 73,000 rounds of ammunition and more than a ton of TNT.<sup>104</sup> Other caches have included cocaine, which the police believe was in partial payment for the weapons. The inevitable resulting engagements between the FARC and paramilitaries who actively pursued them into Panama to disrupt their activities have resulted in threats to Panamanian citizens and increased refugee flows from Colombia into Panama. Death threats forced a Roman Catholic bishop to flee into exile last year after he publicly denounced incursions by both the rebels and the paramilitaries.<sup>105</sup> The situation in Panama really is a paradigm for what will happen in the region if a strong coordinated regional response is not undertaken soon. Panama's "ostrich approach" has allowed the conflict to spill over into Panamanian territory and therefore negatively impact the security of Panamanian citizens.

## **B. OBSTACLES TO A COOPERATIVE RESPONSE**

*We know full well that the driving force should be Colombian and will continue to be Colombian. Do not ask us to interfere – it isn't our style...*

Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, July, 2002

It is apparent from Part A that the responses to the threat of instability brought about by the Colombian crisis have differed remarkably from country to country and from administration to administration, running the gamut from aggressive confrontation to denial to alleged support of the guerrilla groups. However, despite the variations in responses from individual countries, what they all do seem to have in common (with perhaps the exception of Panama) is an increasing awareness of the gravity of the situation in Colombia as the conflict has escalated there and increased the danger of spillover. Despite this shared awareness, however, there seems to be reluctance to develop a comprehensive regional strategy to deal with the problem. In fact, the regional reaction can be characterized by two common courses of action: bilateral efforts between Colombia and its neighbors that seem to address the symptoms of the conflict, namely increased refugee flow, cross border guerrilla and paramilitary activity, and illicit drug

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<sup>104</sup> David Gonzalez, "Bishop in Exile Prays for Panama's Poor," *New York Times*, 5 October, 2000

<sup>105</sup> Joseph Contreras, "Bordering on Chaos; Colombia's Drug-fueled Civil War is Infecting the Region," *Newsweek*, 5 March, 2001

activity; and rhetoric espousing the necessity and willingness for regional cooperation that has yet to evolve into any substantial effort.

This section explores the reasons behind the lack of substantial regional response. In doing so, it attempts to answer why the involved countries have demonstrated little ability to work together to confront the threat in Colombia. It argues that there are four main casual factors at the heart of the issue: 1) Traditional Latin American views on the value of sovereignty; 2.) Internal political and economic problems that keep a nation's focus inward; 3.) The extensive U.S. involvement in the Colombia crisis; and 4.) Lack of precedent for the type of conflict taking place in Colombia and the subsequent threat that any potential spillover poses.

One reason for the lack of regional focus in solving the Colombian problem is the traditional Latin American views on state sovereignty. From Colombia's standpoint, at least prior to President Uribe, beyond intensifying restrictions on the trafficking of arms and chemicals for drug production, there has been no desire in the past to have neighboring nations become involved in the conflict, and hence no requests for any such type of assistance. Similarly, due to the high priority placed on state sovereignty, nationalism and non-intervention, multilateral approaches to problem solving tend to be few and far between in the region. In fact, most Latin American states have made non-intervention in the internal affairs of other Latin American nations a keystone of foreign policy. The concept of non-intervention seems to have originated in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and it was, as Millett explains:

First given concrete expression by Argentine Foreign Minister Luis M. Drago in 1902, this became a central tenant of regional policy, especially as it was directed against interventions in the Caribbean Basin by the United States. Mexico joined Argentina as a leading proponent of this principle and, with support from other nations, they made non-intervention a dominant theme at the International Conferences of American States.<sup>106</sup>

Since that time, non-intervention has remained a key part of most official policies of Latin American countries and the record for collective problem solving has been almost non existent. The Organization of American States (OAS) has long espoused the ideal of

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<sup>106</sup> Richard L.Millett, "Beyond Sovereignty: International Efforts to Support Latin America," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, (1994) p. 2

democracy promotion, but the organization has placed an even higher premium on the principles of non-intervention and respect for a state-centric notion of sovereignty.<sup>107</sup>

However, while the general principle of non-intervention has endured for some time, there have been a number of cautious exceptions in the region. States, while hesitant to tamper with prohibition of intervention, have at least been more cognizant of the legal grounds to act collectively and utilize regional, and especially international organizations as a means to achieve national ends. The 1991 Santiago Declaration obligated member governments of the OAS to consult on actions to reverse or punish coups against democratically elected governments, and the Inter-American Democracy Charter that was signed by Colin Powell for the United States on September 11, 2001, is one of a number of new international instruments giving democratic standards substance as a tool to combat anti-democratic processes in the region.<sup>108</sup> And it seems that it is the legal credibility provided by international or regional organizations that makes the difference in countries willingness to intervene. As Fernando Teson puts forth:

Yet the principles and policies that govern unilateral intervention differ substantially from those that govern collective intervention, especially intervention authorized by international organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization of American States.<sup>109</sup>

Indeed, the OAS has attempted to intervene, politically, and only to a certain degree, a number of times in the name of supporting democracy within the region. The OAS involved itself in Panama in 1989, in Haiti in 1991, in Paraguay in 1996, in Peru in 2000, and most recently in Venezuela in 2002. In each case the OAS involvement was predicated on the desire to defend and consolidate democracy and thus given precedent under formal declarations. Granted, the degree and efficacy of each of those cases of involvement is debatable, but the fact that they occurred at all may signal a shift away from the prohibition on intervention. However, it is also important to note the conditions

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<sup>107</sup> Domingo Avecedo and Claudio Grossman, "The Organization of American States and the Protection of Democracy," in *Beyond Sovereignty: Collectively Defending Democracy in the Americas*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London) p. 133

<sup>108</sup> Elizabeth Spiro Clark, "Venezuelan coup d'etat: More than One Lesson in Democracy," *The Washington Times*, 3 July, 2002

<sup>109</sup> Fernando R. Teson, "Changing Perceptions of Domestic Jurisdiction and Intervention," in *Beyond Sovereignty: Collectively Defending Democracy in the Americas*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London) p. 29

under which those collective interventions occurred, for in each case they were in reaction to attempted coups against democratically elected governments. Since such a coup attempt is unlikely to occur in Colombia, it is necessary to consider the willingness of Latin American countries to intervene in a country dealing with an internal insurgency.

In contrast, the Contadora Group's intervention into the Central American conflict in the 1980's was a diplomatic effort aimed at resolving the insurgencies being waged in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Nicaragua was aiding Salvadoran rebels and the United States organized and supported the "Contras" operations into Nicaragua from Honduras. The dynamics of the insurgency were extremely complex, and the fear in the region was an escalation of conflict that would drag Honduras into the conflict. OAS efforts at negotiating a peace met with resistance; Nicaragua preferred not to have the OAS broker a peace deal as the Sandinistas believed the organization was dominated by U.S. interests, while El Salvador, Costa Rica and Honduras did prefer OAS involvement. As a diplomatic alternative to end the conflict, the Contadora Group was created in January 1983 at the initiative of Colombian President Belisario Betancur (1982-1986).<sup>110</sup> The core countries of the group, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico aimed to fill the diplomatic vacuum created by perceptions of the belligerent nations about the objectivity of the OAS. While it failed to directly produce a peace treaty, instead giving way to peace proposals by Costa Rican President Arias and direct negotiations between the countries, the Contadora Group initiative was ultimately a key first step in the process of bringing about an effectively brokered peace in the region. The OAS eventually supervised elections and the demobilization of the military in Nicaragua.<sup>111</sup> The Contadora Group ultimately expanded and is now the Rio Group, including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Guyana in addition to the original four members.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Susan Kaufman Purcell, "Demystifying Contadora," *Foreign Affairs*, (Fall 1985) [<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/19850901faessay8450/susan-kaufman-purcell/demystifying-contadora.html>] 4 May 2003

<sup>111</sup> John S. Clark, Jr, *Keeping the Peace: Regional Organizations and Peacekeeping*, (School of Advanced Airpower Studies, Maxwell Air Force Base, November 1997) [<http://www.maxwell.af.mil/au/aul/aupress/SAAS/Theses/Clark/clark.pdf>] 3 May 2003

<sup>112</sup> Gustavo Gonzalez, "Rio Group in Chile; A Different Kind of Summit," Inter-Press Service, 10 August 2001



In sum, while the policy of non-intervention has more or less continued to this day based on long established beliefs on sovereignty, there is precedence to indicate that a willingness exists on the part of Latin Americans to tolerate collective intervention in certain cases and thus work together to protect democracy or establish peace regionally. That willingness to tolerate collective action has been based in legal precedent established by OAS charter and has most recently been directed in reaction to coups against democratically elected governments. Earlier, concern about the spillover effects of the conflicts within Nicaragua and El Salvador prompted collective action on the part of the Contadora Group in an attempt to establish peace in the region. These examples point to the possibility for a regional cooperative effort in the Colombian case.

The second issue holding back any semblance of regional partnership in the fight against the security threat posed by the crisis in Colombia is the volatile nature of internal political and economic situations within a number of the countries most directly threatened. Difficulties in adjusting to globalization have destabilized institutions to a degree and subsequently given birth to political dilemmas that require a focus on internal issues; strategic issues of regional security take a back seat by necessity. As globalization undermines the degree of national sovereignty, nations have typically found it difficult to undertake policy or formulate strategies that would seemingly further undermine a sense of national identity. The seriousness of the economic situations and divisive politics present in most of Colombia's neighbors have the cumulative effect of diluting any unity of effort, both within each of those nations and collectively with regards to the threat from the crisis in Colombia. Any attempts at regional unity, especially with regards to a regional security issue, are sabotaged by this phenomenon.

The political situation in Peru is an excellent example. Even after establishing an excellent record in combating insurgency and drug-trafficking in the 1990's, the Fujimori government imploded after the alleged involvement of the President's political associate and director of national intelligence in arms trafficking and sales to Colombian guerillas. The event triggered a collapse of what had been a strong consensus among the ruling political and military elites in the state in dealing with the Colombian crisis and insurgency. President Toledo's attempts to reform the military have led to lowered morale within the security forces and decreased effectiveness. Economic problems also

distract Peru's attention from the crisis in Colombia. The Peruvian economy has been in recession for the greater part of five years, with the gross domestic product around \$55 billion and exports at just \$6 billion.<sup>113</sup> Such economic difficulties have taken the focus of President Toledo's administration away from security issues related to the Colombian crisis.

In Ecuador, a number of international and domestic factors led to crises. The government's attempts to stabilize the economy took center stage as the government attempted to "dollarize" the economy. The political and economic difficulties were so bad during the 1999-2000 time span that fully 4 percent (500,000) of the population left the country.<sup>114</sup> Ecuador had little capacity to respond to the crisis in Colombia and has sought to maintain neutrality vice seek a regionally agreed upon course of action. With these examples of divisiveness and domestic distraction, it's not hard to imagine the difficulties that need to be overcome in internal political matters before a united regional stance can even be considered.

The third factor to consider for an explanation of the lack of a collective effort is the high level of U.S. involvement in the crisis. The United States has been actively involved in Colombia for a number of years, and Plan Colombia is the most recognizable example of U.S. influence in helping Colombia shape a response to the threat. But extensive U.S. involvement has not prompted a more robust regional response. If anything, it can be argued that U.S. involvement in Colombia has had an extremely negative effect on any hopes for regional cooperation. There are a number of reasons to explain this, beginning with the history of past United States involvement in Latin American affairs, which was often in the form of heavy handed intervention. Beginning in the early 1800's, the Monroe Doctrine was invoked numerous times in attempt to keep Europe out of hemispheric affairs.<sup>115</sup> During the Cold War, the United States intervened numerous times in the internal affairs of countries in the region, this time to prevent the

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<sup>113</sup> Abraham Lama, "Economy-Peru: Mounting Debt Could Undermine Toledo's Rule," Global Information Network, 7 November 2002

<sup>114</sup> Judith Gentlemen, *The Regional Security Crisis In the Andes: Patterns of State Response*, Implementing Plan Colombia Series (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, July 2001) p. 17

<sup>115</sup> Richard L. Millett, "Beyond Sovereignty: International Efforts to Support Latin America," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, (1994) p. 2

proliferation of communism in Latin America. Because of historical precedence, Latin American leaders may have a tendency to disregard a policy measure precisely because of U.S. association. As Tom Farer states:

Ambivalence stemmed as well from the history of U.S. intervention in Latin states in the name of promoting democratic values. Linking democracy and security threatened to provide the hemispheric superpower with a normative fig leaf for the pursuit of parochial ends by essentially unilateral means.<sup>116</sup>

Put simply, the national and regional views of many Latin American countries may be influenced to a great degree by a resentment of possible U.S. intervention.<sup>117</sup> A specific example of this fear comes from Brazil, where concern has arisen that the United States intends to establish a military presence in the Amazon, and involvement in Colombia is the conduit to achieve that objective.<sup>118</sup> Whether due to suspicion or resentment of past interventions, the fact that the United States is heavily involved in the Colombian crisis may partly handicap any attempts to establish a regional coalition to deal with the problem.

The fourth reason for the lack of a cooperative effort is the absence of a precedent in Latin America for an alliance to deal with the type of threat faced in Colombia. Simply, there hasn't been an internal conflict in a Latin America country that has posed such a direct threat to an entire region and hence presented the necessity for a cooperative effort. With the exception of what occurred in Nicaragua and El Salvador in the 1980s, which took place in the context of the Cold War and could arguably be labeled inter-state in nature, internal civil wars have rarely posed a threat to neighboring countries to the degree seen in Colombia. However, system type conflicts, which Wolf Grabendorff describes as arising between ideological differences between two states, have resulted in cooperative security efforts.<sup>119</sup> The obvious system conflict was the Cold War, and for

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<sup>116</sup> Tom Farer, "Collectively Defending Democracy in the Western Hemisphere," in *Beyond Sovereignty: Collectively Defending Democracy in the Americas*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996) p. 10

<sup>117</sup> Alistair Hennessy, "The New Radicalism in Latin America," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 7, Issue 1, (January-April 1972) p. 6

<sup>118</sup> Merrick E. Krause, "Partnering for Hemispheric Security: A Combined Regional Operations Center in Brazil," *Aerospace Power Journal*, (2002) p. 4

<sup>119</sup> Wolf Grabendorff, "Interstate Conflict Behavior and Regional Potential for Conflict in Latin America," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Volume 24, Issue 3, (August 1982) p. 281

Latin America, the collective security arrangement within the region was based within an anti-communist ideology led by the United States. The U.S. sponsored security regime within Latin America was formalized by the creation of international coordinating organizations, such as the OAS and procedures established by treaties, such as the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance or Rio Treaty.<sup>120</sup> The Rio Treaty declared that any external attack on any member country would be considered an attack on all. With the end of the Cold War, the framework for the usefulness of such treaties with regards to collective security disappeared. And while the Rio Treaty may have given Latin American states the latitude to act collectively in defense of democracy, the obvious difference is that it was oriented toward an external threat from outside the region, namely the Soviet Union. Additionally, in light of the fact that the Rio Treaty was never invoked even in the face of a number of internally toppled democracies, it can be argued that member states of the OAS never ceased placing a higher emphasis on sovereignty than on the protection of democracy.<sup>121</sup> In sum, the current situation in Colombia poses a unique threat to the region, the character of which has not been seen before in Latin America, and there has been little incentive to form a collective security response in the region.

To date, no coherent strategy or cooperative security effort exists in Latin America to address the very real, region-wide threats posed by the Colombian crisis. After nearly three decades of conflict that has increasingly affected neighboring states, there hasn't been one tangible regional response presented, much less initiated. Section C of this chapter will consider whether or not attitudes of the key Latin American actors affected by the crisis are changing with regards to cooperation, and how any such change may make a coordinated regional effort a plausible form of future response.

### **C. RECENT ADVANCES IN COOPERATION**

All the nations surrounding Colombia have been affected to so some degree by the crisis there, and all fear an escalation of the conflict. However, as noted in Section B,

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<sup>120</sup> Francisco Rojas Aravena, "Security Regimes in the Western Hemisphere: A View from Latin America," in *"Security, Democracy, and Development in U.S.-Latin American Relations"* (North-South Center Press, University of Miami, 1994) p. 171

<sup>121</sup> Domingo Avezado and Claudio Grossman, "The Organization of American States and the Protection of Democracy," in *"Beyond Sovereignty: Collectively Defending Democracy in the Americas"*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996) p. 135

there is no existing consensus on how to address the issue from a regional perspective. It can be argued that of all the countries affected, none (perhaps with the exception of Brazil) have developed any coherent individual strategy for dealing with the crisis. Ambiguity and divisiveness have characterized the country responses to the problem; clearly defined goals and cooperation have been rare commodities. Whether or not this passive stance is due to any combination of the factors mentioned in Section B is, of course, debatable, but there can be no arguing the fact that up until now the countries most directly affected by the crisis have contributed very little in reaching a solution. Whether due to respect for sovereignty, internal dilemmas, or the unprecedented nature of the conflict, the perception is that the majority of Latin American nations have been content to “sit on the sidelines” and allow the United States to be the major contributor in efforts to help Colombia restore stability within its borders. However, there is evidence that the approach taken thus far in the region may be changing. This section will examine how attitudes towards a more active collective solution may be evolving, and how such changes may lead to the introduction of a regional military cooperative effort in response to the crisis in Colombia.

Recent events in the region seem to indicate that a shift is occurring in the long established policy of non-intervention and lack of participation towards the conflict in Colombia, and that there is greater reception towards implementation of collective security measures. After deploying thousands of troops to the border in 2000, Hugo Chavez showed some willingness to cooperate more effectively and to at least consider a unified regional stance. As Judith Gentlemen notes:

In an early sign of what would later come to be a willingness to cooperate on a regional basis, however, Chavez also floated a trial balloon proposing that South American states form a NATO-like military alliance to deal with regional problems...<sup>122</sup>

In September of 2002, Colombia, for the first time, asked for assistance from other Latin American nations to help it in its fight. President Uribe’s call for significant changes to the Rio Treaty to recognize the regional threat to security posed by internal conflicts would presumably make it easier for neighboring countries to overcome issues

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<sup>122</sup>Judith A. Gentlemen, “The Regional Security Crisis In the Andes: Patterns of State Response,” Implementing Plan Colombia Series (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, July 2001) pp 15-16

of sovereignty and collectively assist Colombia through “concrete efforts” in the conflict.<sup>123</sup> Uribe’s call for assistance seems to have had some effect. Many Latin American diplomats have probably realized for some time that they cannot continue to ignore the crisis or pretend that it is Colombia’s problem alone, and more recently they have started to make these sentiments public. In December of 2002, Chilean President Ricardo Lagos called on nations within Latin America to work together to help Colombia solve the current crisis. According to Lagos, “Colombia’s success will be the success of Latin America. We should all assume our responsibilities.”<sup>124</sup> Ecuador and Colombia have begun working on a common security agenda that will entail reinforcing patrols and improving control procedures along their mutual border. In January 2003, Colombia’s Defense Minister Martha Lucia Ramirez told reporters that representatives from both countries would soon meet to discuss improving bilateral security measures in an effort to better secure the common border region.<sup>125</sup> And in March 2003, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva promised President Uribe help in detecting drug traffickers and leftist guerrillas that operate along the Brazil-Colombia border. Reportedly, the Lula administration offered Colombia use of the Brazilian Amazon Surveillance System (SIVAM) that employs planes, radar and satellites to safeguard Brazil’s Amazon region.<sup>126</sup>

In addition to the statements and actions of individual nations, the recent regional response in the context of cooperative measures has also been encouraging. On 12 February, 2003, the OAS issued a resolution condemning the FARC bombing of the Nogal nightclub in Colombia a week earlier. In the resolution, the OAS pledged its cooperation in “pursuing, capturing, prosecuting, punishing, and when appropriate, expediting the extradition of the perpetrators, organizers and sponsors of the attack” on the Bogota nightclub. Additionally, the OAS resolved to “adopt the necessary measures

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<sup>123</sup> Andres Oppenheimer and Francis Robles, “Leader: Colombia to ask its neighbors for more help with security,” *The Miami Herald*, 22 September 2002

<sup>124</sup> Associated Press, “Chilean president urges regional cooperation to help Colombia,” Associated Press Worldstream, 7 December, 2002

<sup>125</sup> Financial Times Information, “Ecuador, Colombia Working on Common Security Agenda,” EFE News Service, 16 January 2003

<sup>126</sup> Financial Times Information, “Brazil to Help Colombia Fight Terrorism, Drug Trafficking,” EFE News Service, 8 March 2003

to intensify information exchange on the activities of terrorist groups, to reinforce border controls and to prevent the movement of terrorists and to suppress the funding of such groups.”<sup>127</sup> On the heels of the OAS resolution, Colombia called for and hosted a regional summit of foreign and defense ministers in March of 2003 to discuss joint strategies in conducting the war on terrorism and drug trafficking. Representatives attended from Brazil, Peru, Venezuela, Panama, Ecuador, Bolivia and the United States. Presumably, one of the goals of the summit was to formulate a regional strategy to confront the terrorist problem posed by armed groups in Colombia. The U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs attended and stated that he considered it a priority to “formulate practical measures” to put into effect the OAS resolution from February.<sup>128</sup>

It is not yet clear what these practical measures might be. The final chapter examines a number of possible scenarios, ranging from a continuation of the status quo to the introduction of a regional military force into Colombia. It evaluates the political feasibility of each option as well as their expected effectiveness in contributing to a resolution of the conflict in Colombia.

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<sup>127</sup> U.S. Department of State, International Information Programs, “OAS Condemns 7 February FARC Bombing in Colombia,” *The Washington File*, 13 February 2002 [<http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/colombia/03021301.htm>] 4 May 2003

<sup>128</sup> Global News Wire, “Colombian Foreign Minister Announces Regional Security Summit,” *The Financial Times Information*, 6 March 2003

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## V. CONCLUSION

Although past history has shown there to be reluctance on the part of Latin American nations to cooperate in reaction to the conflict in Colombia, there seems to be growing support among Colombia's neighbors for some form of regional response to the crisis. It is the central argument of this thesis that the crisis in Colombia has reached a proportion that now warrants a strong and unified regional reaction in the form of a cooperative military effort.

As shown in Chapter II, the crisis in Colombia not only poses a very real threat to the survival of the Colombian state as it is now known, but it also seriously threatens security and stability in neighboring countries. The characteristics of the conflict make it likely that the use of military force, above political and economic means, will be the key to restoring security and that Colombia should make defeat of the insurgency the first objective of any strategy. Because the guerrilla groups espouse violent overthrow of the government and have eschewed all attempts at peaceful resolution of the crisis, they must be weakened significantly in order to end the threat they pose and to allow for more favorable conditions in which to address the narco-trafficking dilemma.

In Chapter III, it was argued that while the political will in Colombia has now strengthened to the point that the military course of action in seeking a solution to the crisis will be more fully supported by all Colombians, Colombia does not possess the military capability to achieve a decisive victory in a timely fashion. Traditional force ratios required for insurgencies and the sheer magnitude of restoring control of Colombian territory while protecting infrastructure and conducting combat operations will continue to overwhelm the Colombian security forces, even with the planned increases in force structure. President Uribe seems to have come to the realization that the military will require external assistance if it is to be successful in the conflict and he has requested regional support to assist Colombia restore security.

While Chapter IV pointed out that history has shown Latin American nations to reluctant to participate in collective security efforts outside the context of the Cold War, it was argued that the need for a cooperative military response among Colombia's neighbors is more critical at this juncture in the crisis than at any other time and that the ground may be ripe for an unprecedented level of regional cooperation in response to the

crisis in Colombia. Bilateral cooperation in response to the conflict has certainly increased, and rhetoric from leaders in the region supporting a much more intensive cooperative effort may be indications of the forging of a foundation for some type of multilateral approach. However, the fact remains that no tangible form of cooperative response has materialized.

This concluding chapter evaluates the possible forms this cooperative response might take. The first section advocates the creation and deployment of a regional military force to Colombia as the most effective means of contributing to a resolution of the crisis. The second section addresses the legal framework required to create and legitimize a regional military action and examines the precedence for the use of such a force. The third section details the operational challenges facing such a force. Since the roadblocks to a regional peacekeeping force are currently judged too difficult to overcome, the final section assesses the political feasibility and effectiveness of alternative courses of regional cooperative action.

#### **A. NEED FOR A REGIONAL MILITARY FORCE**

This thesis has argued that a regional military response, above economic and political measures, will be necessary to defeat the triad of guerrillas, narco-traffickers and paramilitaries and restore security within Colombia and the region. Political negotiation with the actors who generate instability has proved ineffective in the past, as evidenced by the failure of the approaches attempted by Colombia under President Pastrana.<sup>129</sup> Any attempt by external forces to apply political pressure would likewise be blunted. The moral underpinnings of the guerrilla groups, represented by terrorist tactics, involvement in narco-trafficking and their lack of popular support, not only dilute the willingness of any outside source to engage in such a political effort, but also prevent any gains of political leverage should such an effort be attempted. In much the same way, a regional effort to apply economic pressure to coerce the guerrillas to negotiate would be ineffective; there is simply no leverage to be gained against the illicit nature of the insurgent's economic support structure, namely coca cultivation and cocaine production. While one could argue that eradication of coca would be a form of economic pressure,

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<sup>129</sup> Myles Frechette, *In Search of the Endgame: A Long-term Multilateral Strategy for Colombia*, The North South Agenda Papers, Number Sixty-Two, (The North South Center and Strategic Studies Institute, February, 2003) p. 6

years of eradication efforts have failed to achieve significant reductions in either acreage cultivated in Colombia or in the price or availability of cocaine in the U.S.<sup>130</sup> It seems unlikely that a regional eradication effort in an attempt to apply economic leverage would fare any differently. In sum, the dynamics of the conflict predictably negate attempts at either political or economic pressure implemented from a regional position; it seems unrealistic that either form of response can be expected to convince the guerrillas to negotiate seriously at the peace table.

Operationally, Colombia's military is faced with the daunting task of not only engaging guerrillas, drug traffickers and paramilitaries wherever they may exist, but also controlling territory and protecting infrastructure and civilian populations. A tremendous amount of manpower is necessary to perform this function of territorial control and infrastructure protection, and the requirement has detracted considerably from Colombia's efforts to field a substantially larger combat force. It will be years before Colombia has achieved the necessary amount of manpower to maintain control of territory and conduct effective combat operations against the insurgency. It would seem then, that should a regional military response evolve, it would be employed in a role that would free the Colombian security forces from what is essentially guard duty and allow them to focus on the conduct of combat operations, at least until the point that belligerents have been convinced to negotiate a peaceful resolution. While maintaining the capability for combat operations, the concept of employment for such a force would be defensive in nature, designed to ensure that legitimate, state sponsored control of territory is maintained while the Colombian military forces combat the entities in opposition to the state. This thesis will suggest that the most appropriate classification for such a force would fall within the definition of a peacemaking mission. Establishing the mission statement of such a cooperative military force in Colombia would be a major requirement; it would shaped by mandates set at the regional or international level, as well as by the operational situation on the ground. The next two sessions address these issues.

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<sup>130</sup> Phillip Coffin, *Coca Eradication*, Foreign Policy In Focus, (Interhemispheric Resource Center and Institute for Policy Studies, Volume 3, Number 29, October 1998) p. 1

## **B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND PRECEDENCE**

Key for the formation of any regional military cooperative effort in Colombia will be the establishment of legal precedent to justify any intervention. Latin American countries have tolerated intervention in the past, but typically only under the umbrella of legal mandates established either at the international or regional level. This section will attempt to define the legal parameters under which such a force could be created, the proper terminology to apply to such a force, and examine relevant examples to determine if precedence exists for similar efforts.

The necessary first step in establishing the parameters for what a regional military effort may look like in Colombia is to frame the force's potential mission within the context of international or regional mandate. To be successful in garnering international support for such an effort, any regional military force in Colombia would likely need to operate under the legal framework of the United Nations, most likely within the parameters of a U.N. Security Council resolution. The U.N. is currently the only international organization with the chartered authority to promote international peace and stability,<sup>131</sup> and while the U.N. recognizes the vital role that regional organizations can play in dispute resolutions (and in fact the U.N. Charter encourages regional organizations to be the first layer in resolving regional disputes), Article 54 of the U.N. Charter places any such regional organizations under the authority of the Security Council with regard to any type of enforcement action.<sup>132</sup> So, in order to garner international support, any regional military effort in Colombia will likely require a U.N. Security Council resolution. How likely that would be to occur is unclear, and even the necessity for such a resolution is debatable, as NATO's involvement in Kosovo was executed without the consent of the Security Council.<sup>133</sup>

It would also be important to define any use of a regional military force in accordance with international terminology. From the international perspective, any use

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<sup>131</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Victor Tise, "Cooperative Security and Peacekeeping," Conference Report in *The Role of the Armed Forces in the Americas: Civil-Military Relations for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Strategic Studies Institute, 1998) p. 135

<sup>132</sup> Connie Peck, "The Role of Regional Organizations in Preventing and Resolving Conflict," in *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, (United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington D.C., 2001) p. 562

<sup>133</sup> Peck, p. 576

of military force in Colombia would probably fall under the parameters of a peace support operation, a broad category of missions with multiple definitions. In fact, the terminology differences between the United Nations and the United States are actually quite significant regarding definitions of peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace enforcement, and this can lead to confusion among nations and organizations of states. While its definitions can be ambiguous, the United Nations is considered the source of authority for peace support operations, and among U.N. categorizations of peacekeeping, peacebuilding and peacemaking, it is the latter that would be most appropriate under which to frame any collective military action in Colombia. As the United Nations describes it, a peacemaking operation seeks to halt conflicts that have already broken out, and it is, as Dennis J. Quinn states, “action to bring hostile parties to agreement, essentially through such peaceful means as those foreseen in Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations.”<sup>134</sup>

Second, and perhaps more importantly, any regional military action within Colombia will have to be framed within regional legal precedence, and for Latin America that would be within the parameters of the 1947 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, known commonly as the Rio Treaty. The U.S. backed agreement was originally designed to fight the spread of communism, and it is the only substantive security agreement in the hemisphere. The heart of the treaty is Article Three, which states that “an armed attack by any State against an American state shall be considered an attack against all the American States, and, consequently, each one of the said Contracting Parties undertakes to assist in meeting the attack in the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense.”<sup>135</sup> As noted in previous chapters, President Uribe has recently called for changes to the Rio Treaty that would allow internal armed threats to be classified alongside external threats as justification for a collective defensive effort. According to Uribe, these proposed changes would be designed to recognize the regional threat to security posed by internal conflicts and drug trafficking and subsequently make

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<sup>134</sup> Dennis J. Quinn, “Peace Support Operations: Definitions and Implications,” in *Peace Support Operations and the U.S. Military*, (Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University Press, 1994) p. 18

<sup>135</sup> Organization of American States, *Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance*, (Secretariat for Legal Affairs, Organization of American States, 2002) [<http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/Treaties/b-29.html>] 28 May 2003

it easier for neighboring countries to overcome issues of sovereignty and contribute to the war in Colombia.<sup>136</sup> At a minimum, overcoming long standing issues of sovereignty will require placing any such intervention of military force within a regional framework such as the Rio Treaty, and achieving that is arguably the most important step in the formulation of a multi-national military force in Colombia.

The scale of regional military effort proposed by this thesis has not occurred before in Latin America, yet there are international examples to examine. The most well known examples of peacemaking missions were the NATO interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo. In the summer of 1995 NATO aircraft attacked Bosnian Serb positions in order to weaken them militarily and increase their willingness to engage in a peace settlement; and in 1999 NATO aircraft and cruise missiles attacked Serbian positions in Serbia and Kosovo to coerce Serbia's leadership into accepting a multi-faceted peace package that included cessation of all acts of aggression in Kosovo, withdrawal of the bulk of its forces from Kosovo, permitting a NATO peace keeping force to enter into Kosovo, and allowing political autonomy in Kosovo itself.<sup>137</sup> Another example in which a regional military organization took part in a peacemaking mission was the Economic Community of West African States Peace Monitoring Group's (ECOMOG) deployment to Liberia and Sierra Leone in the late 1990s. ECOMOG played a crucial role in restoring peace and security to Sierre Leone and in 1998 was commended by the United Nations for its efforts, even though it was, as the NATO intervention in Kosovo, employed without Security Council Resolution.<sup>138</sup>

While there has been little in the way of peacemaking operations within Latin America, there have been numerous peacekeeping efforts undertaken that perhaps preview the ability for a Latin American multi-national force to operate together to ensure security in the region. Early efforts included the 1948 peace-observer group that was set up along the border of Nicaragua and Costa Rica; the group was made up of five

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<sup>136</sup> Andres Oppenheimer and Francis Robles, "Leader: Colombia to ask its neighbors for more help with security," *The Miami Herald*, 22 September 2002

<sup>137</sup> Richard Haas, "Using Force: Lessons and Choices", in *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, (United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington D.C., 2001) p. 300

<sup>138</sup> Connie Peck, "The Role of Regional Organizations in Preventing and Resolving Conflict," in *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, (United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington D.C., 2001) p. 576

inter-American military experts under the control of the OAS's Committee of Information.<sup>139</sup> In 1965-1966 the Inter-American Peace Force was deployed in response to the crisis in the Dominican Republic. While an example of a multinational regional military force, approximately ninety percent was U.S. military and the underlying motivations for the force were largely in regards to U.S. interests in the region.<sup>140</sup> The most relevant example of a peacekeeping force in the Western Hemisphere was ONUCA, which was an acronym for "UN Observers in Central America." ONUCA was essentially a border-observation peacekeeping mission in the late 1980s and early 1990s that was created in response to the crisis in Nicaragua and El Salvador; it is more applicable to the situation in Colombia primarily because it was a multinational force that had the capability to conduct peace enforcement missions. Venezuela contributed an airborne infantry battalion that provided the teeth for prodding the demobilization of the Contras, and Argentina provided fast patrol boats and personnel to operate them. Other Latin American countries contributed military participation as well, with observers from Ecuador, Venezuela, Brazil and Colombia.<sup>141</sup>

The most recent example for consideration is the Military Observer Mission Ecuador/Peru (MOMEP) that was created in 1995 to help keep the peace between Peru and Ecuador; there was a high level of cooperation and coordination between and within the political and military representatives of the participating countries. Command relationships took some time to be ironed out, but eventually a Brazilian general officer was appointed coordinator over ten officer/observers each from Argentina, Chile, and the United States, and he exercised operational control over the other nation's officers. At the same time, the political direction of the mission was exercised via a committee consisting of representatives from the Brazilian foreign ministry and the ambassadors of Argentina, Chile, and the United States.<sup>142</sup> While the situation in Colombia is quite different than any mentioned above, and the military peacemaking solution suggested by

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<sup>139</sup> Jack Child, "Peacekeeping and the Inter-American Military System," in *Peacemaking, Peacekeeping and Coalition Warfare: The Future Role of the United Nations*, (National Defense University Press, 1994) p. 243

<sup>140</sup> Child, p. 244

<sup>141</sup> Child, p. 247

<sup>142</sup> Glenn R. Weidner, "Operation Safe Border: The Ecuador-Peru Crisis", *Joint Forces Quarterly*, (Spring 1996) p. 54

this thesis unprecedented in Latin American history, the previous examples do demonstrate that larger scale cooperative military efforts are possible in Latin America. They may also serve as guides for how such an effort in Colombia might be structured.

In sum, there are three basic considerations when formulating the possibility for a regional military effort in Colombia. International endorsement of such an effort would most likely have to be established via a U.N. Security Council Resolution; the effort would have to be defined in internationally accepted and understood terminology; and gaining regional support for such an effort would likely entail modifications to the Rio Treaty, much as President Uribe has suggested. More detailed follow on requirements of mission, organizational structure, command and control would all be contingent on the establishment of some type of mandate from either the U.N. or the O.A.S. and a definition of the mission in doctrinal terms. Section C will determine what those requirements and possible roadblocks are to realizing the use of a regional military force in Colombia.

### **C. OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS**

While coming to agreement upon the mandates, accords and definitions establishing the legal framework for a multi-national military effort is the first challenge to overcome in the formulation of a regional military effort in Colombia, the operational requirements of such an effort -- its organizational structure, command and control, and funding – can also pose insurmountable obstacles to the implementation of a regional military response.

Structural issues regarding the size and composition of such a force should be based on two principles related to peace operations.<sup>143</sup> First the force must be adequately trained, led and equipped. Any such endeavor in Colombia will need a highly trained, cohesive force, well equipped to deal with the belligerents in the conflict. Leadership that is capable of producing these characteristics will be essential. Second, the force must have the means from the outset to establish dominance on the ground; the necessary mandate must be in place, rules of engagement must be effective, and command, control, communications and intelligence must be capable enough to put pressure on the

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<sup>143</sup> Chester A. Crocker, "Intervention: Toward Best Practices and a Holistic View," in *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, (United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington D.C., 2001) p. 240



belligerents. The requirement for a bureaucracy to properly handle the decision and policy processes required for any such collective military intervention is also apparent. While the framework for a collective security organization to legitimize a combined military response already exists in the OAS, along with the legal precedence for intervention in carrying out the protection of democracy, a unified command and control system to coordinate military action would still be needed for planning, decision-making and communications to direct any multinational military operation. Currently only the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) maintains such a bureaucracy.<sup>144</sup> As seen in Section B above, a critical requirement is for such an architecture to orchestrate what would undoubtedly be a complex operation.

Key to meeting the two principles above would be financial resources. And while the amount of funding required for such a substantial effort is difficult to estimate, there are a number of examples that may give a sense of scale to the level of financial commitment a peacemaking operation entails. The ECOMOG case referenced above cost approximately \$1 billion, spread over several years.<sup>145</sup> And while ECOMOG was not a U.N. mandated mission, it is helpful to compare its cost to the total U.N. peacekeeping expenditures for 2002, which were estimated at \$2.63 billion.<sup>146</sup> U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) figures are also useful in gaining a perspective on the costs of peacekeeping. In March 1999, DoD estimated that operating a force of 4,000 U.S. peacekeepers in Kosovo would cost \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion a year.<sup>147</sup> While there are a number of different variables between ECOMOG, Kosovo and Colombia, it seems clear that any such effort in Colombia will require a large amount of funding, and the uncertainty of the source of financing presents a substantial obstacle to the realization of regional peacemaking force.

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<sup>144</sup> Jimmy Tan, *Regional Security Partners: The Potential for Collective Security*, (Naval War College, 1999) p. 8

<sup>145</sup> Mark Malan, "The Crisis in External Response," in *Peace Profit or Plunder?: The Privatisation of Security in War-Torn African Countries*, (Institute for Security Studies, 2003) [<http://www.iss.co.za/>] p. 49, 5 June 2003

<sup>146</sup> Marjorie Ann Brown, *United Nations Peacekeeping, Issues for Congress*, (Issue Brief for Congress, 5 February 2003) [<http://www.usembassy.it/pdf/other/IB90103.pdf>] p. 3, 5 June 2003

<sup>147</sup> Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, *After the War, Kosovo Peacekeeping Costs*, (Defense Budget Studies, CSBA Online, 6 July 1999) [<http://www.csbaonline.org>] 5 June 2003

#### **D. THE MOST LIKELY SCENARIO**

The regional military cooperative option presented in this thesis, while arguably the quickest, most efficient and effective measure to restore security in Colombia and the region, is not likely to occur in the near future due to roadblocks to formulating and sustaining such an effort. While the factors presented in the previous sections – absence of a mandate for intervention, uncertainty about funding and absence of an effective architectural structure for coordinating such a measure are all significant obstacles, it is the lack of political will on the part of Colombia's neighbors that remains the most significant factor preventing a regional military response. Despite rhetoric that may indicate otherwise, Colombia's neighbors have failed to achieve any substantial objectives in the quest for a regional stance towards the crisis. For its part, Colombia has addressed the historical concerns around issues of sovereignty through Uribe's recent call for assistance and request to modify the Rio Treaty. While such appeals theoretically open the gate for nations to participate in such an endeavor, there appears to be considerable reluctance on the part of Colombia's neighbors to enter into such an arrangement, despite rhetoric to the contrary. Colombia may possess the political will to solicit cooperation, but in the absence of concrete measures, it is still unclear what level of commitment the solicited possess.

It is far more likely that some other form of regional effort will evolve in response to the Colombian crisis; one likely to be much less efficient and timely than the one promoted here, but perhaps more politically feasible in the short run. This section evaluates the likelihood and effectiveness of three possible alternative courses of action: maintenance of the status quo, increased bilateral cooperation, and regional military cooperation outside of Colombia's borders.

The first possible course of action is one in which Colombia's neighbors maintain the status quo; they continue bilateral cooperative efforts with Colombia and attempt to minimize the threat to national security, or maintain a neutral stance with regards to the conflict in the hopes of acting as a mediator in future peace negotiations. There may also be continued rhetoric about the need for regional unity, but without any substantial effort made towards that goal. In this scenario, the conflict would continue on as it has for the past several years, with Colombia attempting to defeat the sources of insecurity within its

borders and neighboring nations taking the myopic approach of attempting to prevent spillover into their own borders. Bilateral cooperative efforts (or lack thereof) would continue in the same cycle seen in the past decade. For all the reasons brought about in this thesis, this is perhaps the most unlikely scenario presented here. It simply will not be possible for nations of the region to maintain the status quo; the myriad of issues and problems pushed upon Colombia's neighbors as a result of the increasing conflict will only serve to intensify efforts to explore alternative strategies to deal with the increasing border activity that is likely to evolve as Colombia steps up military operations.

A second possible course of action is one of increased bilateral cooperation and increased rhetoric about the need for regional cooperation, yet little in the way of substantive effort. In this scenario, Colombia and its neighbors increase their efforts at bilateral cooperation in a sort of "hub and spoke" approach that is less than holistic. While increased bilateral efforts might at first be considered a measure of success and even as evidence of a more regional stand towards the crisis, the fatal flaw in this approach would ultimately become clear: such a bilateral cooperative effort would tend to favor the relatively strong countries such as Brazil, Peru and Venezuela, while the weaker countries such as Panama and Ecuador are likely to be increasingly threatened by spillover effects. In sum, it is unlikely that either of the first two scenarios would be successful strategies; the spillover effect would likely threaten to overwhelm one or more of Colombia's neighbors as military operations are increased within Colombia. There would be subsequent realization on the part of Colombia's neighbors that the scope of the conflict and the balloon effect that increased Colombian military operations will most likely produce will not be effectively solved without some form of regional cooperation.

In the third scenario, one could expect to see a more substantive option in the form of a regional effort to contain the conflict albeit one that operates outside of Colombia's borders. Such an approach would allow regional measures to contain the conflict within Colombia without impinging on Colombia's sovereignty, most likely in the form of regionally instituted intelligence sharing and border control measures that allow Colombia and its neighbors to take more coordinated action in addressing the issues of the crisis. Such a cohesive approach might be carried out via a multi-national military advisory board made up of personnel from each country in the region. Based on

recognition that there will be a high probability for spillover out of Colombia, and that spillover will be more likely to prove a disproportional threat to one or more of Colombia's neighbors, this third course of action is perhaps the most likely scenario of the three presented here; a necessary increase in the level of multilateral cooperation between Colombia and its neighbors that benefits every nation to some degree, short of the formation of a regional military force that operates within Colombia. Such an effort would be politically acceptable, and could conceivably be instituted without substantial legal mandate by regional or international organizations. The command and control effort needed for this type of effort would hardly be as complicated as what would be needed to control a regional military force operating within Colombia; it is not hard to envision a collective of military experts from Colombia and its neighbors that exists to coordinate attempts to contain the conflict within Colombia's borders. Financing such an endeavor would also be much more palatable, as the cost would be considerably lower than fielding a military force.

The effectiveness of such an effort is guesswork at this point; such an option combined with stronger bilateral ties might prove successful, but primarily at negating the spillover effects propagated by an increase in Colombian military operations. In essence, the third course of action is just a larger dose of the methodology behind the first two courses of action; even though it could be pointed to as evidence of concrete regional cooperation, it would in reality be another stop gap measure that only addresses the symptoms of the problem while doing very little to assist Colombia resolve the real issue of restoring legitimate control over its territory. In contrast, employing an internationally or regionally mandated peacemaking force, as suggested by this thesis, would be a much more holistic approach that would essentially attempt to address the cause of the symptoms. Such a regional force, while politically and financially riskier than any of the courses of action suggested above, is ultimately the most effective strategy for Colombia's neighbors to adopt.

Whatever the actual regional cooperative strategy turns out to be, this thesis has attempted to establish that the situation in Colombia requires, at a minimum, a substantial regional cooperative military effort. And, however likely such an effort may or may not be, it would be unprecedented in Latin American history and would perhaps be an

excellent opportunity for establishing solidarity among nations of the region, in addition to putting some real teeth into the Organization of American States rhetoric regarding the necessity of upholding democracy and security in the region. It may also prove to be the beginnings of a new era of cooperative effort that forges a more secure and cohesive Latin America.

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